Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai Volume 1

source : http://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Boku_wa_Tomodachi_ga_Sukunai:Volume_1

Color Illustrations

僕は友達が少ない

平坂読 yomi hirasaka

僕は友達が少ない
平坂読

MF文庫 J
ひ-02-19

ISBN978-4-8401-2879-7
C0193 ¥580E

9784840128797

1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）
メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

僕は友達が少ない

学校で浮いている羽瀬川小鷹は、ある時いつも不機嫌そうな美少女の三日月夜空が一人で楽しげに喋っているのを目撃する。「もしかして幽霊とか見える人？」「友達と話していただけだ。エア友達と！」「（駄目だこいつ……）」小鷹は夜空とどうすれば友達が出来るか話し合うのだが、夜空は無駄な行動力で友達作りを目指す残念な部まで作ってしまう。しかも何を間違ったか続々と残念な美少女達が入部してきて——。みんなでギャルゲーをやったりプールに行ったり演劇をやったり色々と迷走気味な彼らは本当に友達を作れるのか？　アレげだけどやけに楽しい残念系青春ラブコメディ誕生！

MF文庫 J

恋く友情 …… だよね？

なが～く愛して♥ 7周年フェア

7周年フェア

580

3冊買って素敵なプレゼントをもらっちゃおう!

「なが～く愛して♥7周年」フェア帯についている応募用紙に応募券を貼り、必要事項を記入したものを下記宛先にお送りください。詳しい送り方は帯の折り返しをご参照ください。

希望タイトルが選べる!!
各7名様 超ビッグプレゼント
A賞　直筆サイン入りほぼ等身大タペストリー
B賞　直筆サイン色紙

必ずもらえる 応募者全員サービス
特製スリムポスター　1口につき1種類、どちらかのセットを選べます。
ブン子セット：ゼロの使い魔 & けんぷファー
J太セット　：聖剣の刀鍛冶 & 緋弾のアリア

応募〆切
2009年
9月30日（水）
当日消印有効

宛先：〒150-0002 渋谷区渋谷3-3-5 NBF渋谷イースト（株）メディアファクトリー「なが～く愛して♥7周年」フェア係

※記入漏れや間違い、応募券がない等の不備があった場合は、応募が無効となりますのでご注意ください。
※お預かりする個人情報は、プレゼントの発送以外には使用いたしません。　※当選者の発表は賞品の発送をもって代えさせていただきます。

MF文庫J

平坂読の本

ホーンテッド!①〜④ [イラスト:片瀬優]

ソラにウサギがのぼるころI〜IV [イラスト:湊ヒロム]

ねくろま。 [イラスト:じろう]

ねくろま2。 [イラスト:じろう]

ねくろま3。 [イラスト:じろう]

ねくろま4。 [イラスト:じろう]

ねくろま5。 [イラスト:じろう]

ねくろま6。 [イラスト:じろう]

ねくろま∞。 [イラスト:じろう]

ラノベ部 [イラスト:よう太]

ラノベ部2 [イラスト:よう太]

ラノベ部3 [イラスト:よう太]

僕は友達が少ない [イラスト:ブリキ]

平坂読(ひらさか・よみ)

業界の片隅で細々と生き続けるライトノベル作家。友達が少ないことに定評がある。

Illustration

◎ブリキ

家から100メートル程の駄菓子屋に行くだけで息が切れます……歳ですね。

カバーイラスト／ブリキ　装丁／blue

[TL note: from right to left]

These are the novel illustrations that were included in the volume

僕は友達が少ない

平坂読 yomi hirasaka

MF文庫 J

ひ-02-19

僕は友達が少ない

平坂読

MEDIA FACTORY

580

9784840128797

ISBN978-4-8401-2879-7
C0193 ¥580E

1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）
メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

僕は友達が少ない

学校で浮いている羽瀬川小鷹は、ある時いつも不機嫌そうな美少女の三日月夜空が一人で楽しげに喋っているのを目撃する。「もしかして幽霊とか見える人？」「友達と話していただけだ。エア友達と！」「（駄目だこいつ……）」小鷹は夜空とどうすれば友達が出来るか話し合うのだが、夜空は無駄な行動力で友達作りを目指す残念な部まで作ってしまう。しかも何を間違ったか続々と残念な美少女達が入部してきて――。みんなでギャルゲーをやったりプールに行ったり演劇をやったり色々と迷走気味な彼らは本当に友達を作れるのか？　アレげだけどやけに楽しい残念系青春ラブコメディ誕生!

Prologue and Character Introduction is a lot like Clamping

I'll be honest with you, the following is a hallucination.

We all arrived on a southern tropical island.

Even though there are many different types of southern tropical islands, these kinds of scenes seem to drift through one's mind: skimpy clothing, a beautiful ocean, coconuts, hula dances etc. This is what a normal summer paradise should be about.

We, the members of the 'Neighbors Club', were making the most of our time in this paradise.

As I lay on a beach chair enjoying the sun, my attention turned toward the sandy beach.

Two girls are happily building a sand castle.

The girl who looks to be about ten; the one with blue eyes, silver hair, and a school swimsuit; is Maria Takayama.

As you can see, she really is a loli. She is a nun of the Saint Chronica School and the supervisor of the Neighbors Club.

The slightly older girl with her, the one with blond hair and red and blue heterochromatic eyes, is Kobato Hasegawa.

Instead of her usual goth-loli dress she's wearing something normal today.

As if. She's wearing a barely-there bikini.

Kobato is my, Kodaka Hasegawa's, blood-related little sister.

"Aniki, would you like some juice?"

I looked to my side and to the person talking to me. The person is wearing a cute, two-piece pareo-style swimsuit. In the person's hand is a very tropical-looking glass of juice with decorative fruit. This cute boy has a very gentle smile on his face.

"Ah, thanks."

I accepted the glass of juice from him and started drinking from it.

Lying on a chair not far from me is a girl wearing glasses. In one hand she has a drink and in the other is the book she's reading.

This girl, with her ponytail and one-piece swimsuit plus outer cloak, is Rika Shiguma.

The book in her hand is a BL doujin featuring UC Gundam and EVA #0.

"Ahaha, take this~~~♥!"

"Kyaa, it's cold~~~♥!"

At the edge of the sea two girls are happily splashing water at one another.

The girl with the beautiful patterned bikini, light eyes, blonde hair, and a great body is Sena Kashiwazaki.

Her companion is the sharp-eyed, black-haired girl, Yozora Mikadzuki.

Yozora's swimsuit is, how should I put it… It's something that has nothing to do with words like sexy, beautiful, or even moe. Her whole body, from neck to toe, is covered by a black and white striped swimsuit.

The sight of those two cute girls playing and laughing together could be a scene on a canvas! Looking at it is enough to make your heart pump faster.

Even though something seems amiss we look like we're realfilled (meaning to live a fulfilling real life.)

What excellent realfillment.

What fantastic realfillment.

"Ahaha… what fantastic realfillment… I'm so happy, ahaha. Everyone in the Neighbors Club is getting along so well with one another… ahahahaha…"

But as I said before, this is only a hallucination.

"-npai. Wake up Senpai… here."

BZZBZZBZZ

"~~~~~~~~~!?"

A jolt of electricity surged through my body, and my fuzzy consciousness is shocked back into reality.

By the way, 'a jolt of electricity' was not a metaphor; I really got tasered.

And the one guilty of waking me up through electricity is sitting right beside me.

"Fufufu… you want to escape by yourself. That's very sly of you, Kodaka-senpai."

Said Rika Shiguma, armed with a slightly mad smile. She's a bespectacled girl with her school uniform covered by a lab coat.

"I had a cheerful vision…"

I answered with a distant gaze.

"And what kind of vision was that?"

"Yozora and Sena were happily playing together."

"What an unscientific scene."

"It's not that unscientific…"

But you know, I can understand why Rika said that.

There is no way that those two would play together intimately.

For example, right now:

"Aren't things starting to get tough? You might want to surrender now; it's for your own good, Meat…"

The black-haired girl, Yozora Mikadzuki, said with bloodshot eyes.

"Fufufu… It should be you who's about to give up, right? You're already choking."

The blonde-haired girl, Sena Kashiwazaki, is as excited as Yozora. Crazy smiles appeared on both of their faces.

Suddenly both of them stabbed their chopsticks into the bubbling hotpot, simultaneously snatching some black 'things' out of the pot. They immediately stuffed the 'things' into their mouths.

"Ugh…"

"Guh…"

It looks like both of them evaded successfully; they yelled in voices on the verge of breakdown.

"Ga gah agah so spicy, gahhhh!"

Yozora clutched her throat with a pained expression.

"Uuh… Uuuuuuh… sweet… no that's not right… my mouth feels so slimy. My throat, it feels like it's rotting… grosssssss…"

Sena's eyes rolled up into the back of her head while tears streamed down her face like waterfalls.

…Back in the real world we are experiencing hell.

Before this happened we were in this small, beautifully furnished, western-style room.

All seven of us were sitting around the small round table in the center of the room.

In the middle of the table was a pot. A pot whose black contents bubbled, even though there was no flame underneath it.

To my right is Rika, and to my left is a silver-haired loli in a habit and a blonde gothic loli. The two girls have collapsed on the floor together.

The silver-haired one is Maria Takayama and the blonde one is Kobato Hasegawa.

"Onii-chan… Onii-chan… the devil, the devil is here…"

"An-chan, come back, you can't kill it…" [1]

They both have odd, pained expressions on their faces and are murmuring to themselves as if they're in the middle of a nightmare.

Sitting beside Rika is Yozora.

Sitting beside Kobato and Maria-sensei is Sena.

And then, squeezed between Yozora and Sena, is the cute boy in a maid uniform; Yukimura Kusunoki.

Yukimura was silently and methodically moving his chopsticks back and forth between the pot and his mouth.

Even though the motion didn't stop, he was no longer grabbing food from the pot.

Yukimura's eyes had lost their focus; he was dead.

"Yukimura… you've passed away as well…"

I whispered sadly.

"Here Kodaka, you eat some as well…"

"Fufufu… hurry up and eat. Now is the time for the decisive battle…"

Yozora and Sena, with insanity clouding their eyes, said this to me.

"Uhh…"

So I, with a defeated look, put the lower ends of my chopsticks into the bubbling pot.

The contents of the pot were emitting a sweet, smelly, or even sour scent. The scent was strong enough to make my skin twitch, my eyes tear, and my nose itch. All in all, the pot was giving out a smell so strong it made me ill.

"Hey are you sure nothing toxic was added…?"

"Theoretically yes, Kodaka-senpai, my toxin test is capable of accurately detecting any poison so…"

Rika replied uncertainly.

So what exactly were we doing? We were trying to have a black hotpot party.

The idea started a few days ago.

Sena said that she wanted to have a hotpot party with her galgame friends. Coincidentally Yozora saw the game on the screen and commented that "eating a hotpot together is what a bunch of friends would do."

Sena and I agreed.

So Yozora suggested:

"To prevent screwing up when we have a hotpot party with our friends we should practice having a hotpot meal here."

'Enjoying a hotpot meal after school.' It was such an innocent idea that we were all interested in it, so we agreed to meet up after school.

Even though school rules forbid having open flames anywhere outside the cooking classroom, Rika invented a pot that can cook without fire, so that problem was solved.

When we were deciding what sort of hotpot we should make, Sena said “black hotpot is good.”

Apparently she chose it because in some galgame there was a scene where the friends meet up for a black hotpot party. The all looked very happy while they ate from the hotpot together.

As we heard that we somehow thought “that could be good…”

After we decided on the type we also decided that I, as the only person who knew how to cook, should prepare the soup.

So, during the past weekend, I started preparing the black soup for the black hotpot.

I found out later on that we had apparently misunderstood what a black hotpot was; the black part refers to dimming the lights when you are about to put food into the pot, not the color of the soup.

But anyway, I used squid and black sesame as main ingredients for the soup. Then I added other seafood to make the soup a bit spicy. Regardless, the end result was a tasty black soup for a tasty black hotpot.

So on the following Monday at the beginning of the hotpot party I poured my soup into Rika’s pot, dimmed the lights and let

the others put their ingredients in. Finally, the black hotpot party had started.

And here we are.

My painstakingly and delicately prepared soup was now giving out an indescribable odor. Even though it remained pitch-black I couldn't help but feel that it had become something similar to mud .

I told them to only put in edible stuff, and it went without saying that no poison was allowed. But how did this happen? It's was so surreal that It caused me to hallucinate.

Right up to the point where they put their food in everyone was happy. But when the delicious smelling seafood soup turned nasty the smiles on everyone's faces disappeared.

Whenever we attempted to take some food from the pot the mood of the room decayed a bit.

Maria-sensei and Kobato collapsed within the first ten minutes.

Yozora and Sena were especially affected;

"This is your fault for having the retarded idea to have a black hotpot!"

"It's your fault for suggesting a hotpot party in the first place!"

"The worst ingredient is your canned herring!"

"It's a kind of sardine, so it shouldn't taste bad! Your mango and strawberry are much worse!"

Just like that they try to shift the blame.

At some point in the argument, the incomprehensible rule, 'last to go down is the victor,' was established.

Because of that, Yukimura is dead.

Lucky for me, all the food I pulled out were normal things like meatballs and taro (I bought them myself), so I've survived until now. But it doesn't change the fact that the stench has turned this room into a living hell.

Rika, who suffered from a slight loss of sense of taste, could either be described as lucky or unlucky. From her eyes alone it was clear that she couldn't take it anymore.

Rika and I extended our chopsticks out and each grabbed something from the dark matter. We held our breath and swallowed them.

Even though the soup tastes like crap, the food is still edible… but… but… but what is that? Judging from the texture… was that broccoli?

On the other side, Rika seems to have hit the jackpot.

"From my memory the thing that tastes the closest to this is… Methylethanolamine."

Right after her voice died off Rika stopped moving as well.

"Even you…"

Damn it, now I finally understand; black hotpot parties are only fun when you have them with your true friends.

It's not for people who are far from the point of calling one another friends.

To add insult to injury all of our idiotic members each brought servings of ingredients like soft candies and fruits, stuff that would make us sorry later on.

At that time why did I think this would be interesting?

I really regret this.

"The next one…"

"I know…"

The sweat soaked Sena and Yozora glared at each other with miserable smiles.

I also raised my chopsticks in defeat and simultaneously all three of us got something out of the pot.

Together we crammed our mouths with food and forcefully chewed.

"Oh… oh… oehhhhhhhhhhh."

"Uwaa?!"

Sena fell backward!

In that fleeting moment an egotistical smile of victory appeared on Yozora's face. Then her face suddenly turned pale:

"Uh… ogehh…"

And she started puking.

Sena and Yozora's eyes lost their focus and they both collapsed.

"Uwah, hey, are you two alright?"

As an aside, this once again reaffirmed my belief that there was something wrong with their heads.

Ugh… even their puke is black… so disgusting.

I felt like puking as well so I hurriedly opened all the windows to ventilate the room. I took a deep breath of the fresh air outside.

And then, to get rid of the puke, I went outside to get some wiping cloths.

What if… to be honest I'm more worried about the puke on the carpet than those people.

This is one of the rooms in Saint Chronica School's chapel; " Meeting Room #4."

For now it had become a hell that was filled with corpses. This was our Neighbors Club activity room.

Neighbors Club, even though our club does many different and interesting activities on paper, in truth they were mostly simple and were done without any guiding principle. Each club member just wastes their time chatting, gaming, making games, writing novels, drawing manga, practicing musical instruments, acting, doing standup comedy, doing Shinken Zemi [2], preparing ' obscure topics for discussion' and finally eating black hotpot.

Even after hearing the list of club activities, chances are good that you can't comprehend what the goal of this club is.

The goal of this club, to put it frankly, is to make friends.

These are the regretful club activities done by a bunch of regretful people. With the two main heroines hurling within the first 10 pages of the book, a very regretful slice-of-life story begins…

Kodaka Hasegawa

I was reading in the library when I realized the sun was already setting in the horizon.

It was time to go home. I walked out of the library, then I remembered that I had forgotten my PE uniform so I headed back towards my classroom.

Since most students were already out of school or doing their club activities, there were not many students in the hallway.

I walked through the amber-red hallway alone.

When I arrived at the door of my 2nd year 5th class' classroom I could hear laughter from inside it.

"Haha you're kidding, there's no way that's true."

It seemed that someone was still inside the classroom.

It was a female voice.

How could I describe that voice… let's just say it was a very pleasant voice.

The tone was neither too high nor too low, it seeped through my ears and percolated through my brain where it slowly spread out giving me a wonderful feeling.

But I didn't recall ever hearing this voice.

Although it had only been a month since I transferred here, I should have already recognize all of my classmates' voices. I wouldn't have forgotten the owner of such a wonderful voice.

Another thing that I noticed was that I could only hear one voice.

Perhaps she was talking on her phone.

I suppose if I entered the classroom while she was talking on her phone she wouldn't be startled that badly, right?

Well, although I couldn't help it, I didn't want to frighten her.

I would like to avoid that situation.

So what should I do…should I wait until she finishes with her call and leaves the classroom?

No, wait a second. It's not like I'm planning anything bad. Can't I just walk into the classroom like a normal person and grab my things? Wouldn't that be better?

Inside the classroom was a female student.

She was sitting beside the open windowsill. Her fair legs, shaded amber by the setting sun, were dangling against the wall. She was happily chatting away.

As the soft wind blew, a blue-tinted shimmer could be seen from her gently shifting hair.

She was neither tall nor short, yet she had a slender body.

To top it all off she was very cute, in other words, a normal person would refer to her as a 'bishoujo' [3].

From what I remembered, her name was Yozora Mikadzuki.

Usually I'm very bad at remembering people's faces and their names together. Male students aside, I only remembered the names of a few girls; even then I had only a fleeting impression of them.

She is one of my classmates in 2nd year 5th class.

Yozora Mikadzuki; a student of Saint Chronica School's 2nd year 5th class…even though that's what I remembered, I was puzzled.

"Ahaha, that's what I said before, it's not true. Oh you know that teacher,"

As far as I can remember, I have never seen her chatting like a normal female high school student.

Mikadzuki always had a scowl on her face. There was a constant annoyed aura around her. During breaks I never saw her go anywhere or hang out with anyone.

In English class, sometimes there were dialogue exercises with other students. She would just sit in her seat and stare out the window. Apparently she had been like this since the first year, so the English teacher gave up on her a long time ago.

Also, when she was asked to answer questions in other classes, she would always answer the questions correctly with a very gloomy voice, unlike the lively tone she was using right now. (She looked like a hard-working student; I had never seen her answer a question incorrectly).

"Eeh? Really? Ahaa that's so kind…"

With her scowls and prickly attitude gone and her innocent laughter, Mikadzuki looked like a different person. She… is really cute.

Was this really Yozora Mikadzuki?

In all seriousness I contemplated this thought.

And then I realized an even stranger thing.

She was not holding a cell phone.

There was no one other than her in the classroom and I didn't hear anyone's voice other than hers.

She was looking at an empty spot and, as if someone was there, happily chatting with it.

Alone in the sunset-lit classroom, a bishoujo was talking to an invisible thing.

Strangely enough, the intros of the light novels I read back in the library were pretty much the same.

So that's what was going on, right?

I accidentally find out about her secret and get dragged into her battles with ghost and monsters and all sorts of things that 'should not exist in this world.' As the bishoujo and I survive through different kinds of battles and difficulties we fall in love with one another. Was I fated to encounter that kind of cliché story?

But if I calmed down and thought about it that scenario was impossible. Those novels had some leftover illustrations in my heart, that was all. It was only because my school life was so dull that I subconsciously sought that kind of supernatural story.

Regardless, I was starting to get a bit unsettled.

Without noticing it, I had turned the classroom doorknob.

Kachak.

The door opened smoothly.

"Speaking of which, at that time Tomo-chan said-"

I made eye contact with Yozora Mikadzuki.

For a split second she seemed to be at a loss for words. But she quickly switched back to her usual annoyed expression…and her cheeks became several shades redder than the setting sun.

This was extremely bad.

By now all I could do was act as if I had seen nothing, say out loud that I forgot my things, grab them then get the hell out of there.

But due to an unfortunate coincidence, my window side seat was right in front of hers.

So I had no choice but to walk by her. As I feebly smiled at her I carefully walked towards her (technically I was walking toward my desk).

In that instant Mikadzuki had a frightened look on her face.

"It's like an eagle that spotted its prey and is licking its beak in glee…!"

As expected, she was glaring at me.

With my sudden presence, she was completely on guard against me.

"Ah that…"

If I just approached her without saying anything she would remain hostile towards me. I guess I should first open my mouth and say something.

“What?”

As she glared at me and asked, her tone was completely opposite from what I had earlier. It was very low as she showed no restraint on her hostility.

“That…”

Regretfully, I was neither a police detective nor a negotiator. Furthermore, I was never that sociable in the first place. I didn’t know what sort of conversation topics I could use to break the ice.

“Can… can you see ghosts or something?”

Anyway I felt the need to say something. So I said that.

In response Mikadzuki said “What?” again. She looked at me as if I was a moron.

“Why would there be a ghost here?”

“No, but you were just talking to something…”

In one fell swoop, Mikadzuki’s face became bright red.

“So you saw it….”

After she groaned indignantly, she turned to me once again and looked at me directly. In a proud and upright way, she announced,

“I was just talking to my friend. To my air friend!”

…?

It took me almost half a minute to try and comprehend what she had just said.

And then I finally understood; she had just said something that I was incapable of understanding.

“Air friend?”

As she scowled, Mikadzuki nodded in irritation.

“What’s that?”

"It means exactly what I said it means! Isn't there something called 'air guitar'? It's something like that, except it's a friend!"

"…Let's see…"

I brought my palm to my forehead to give myself a chance to think.

"So what you are saying, is that you have an imaginary friend and you were just chatting with her? So why-"

"Not imaginary. Tomo-chan is real! See, she's right there."

It seemed that the name of her air friend was Tomo-chan.

And of course I don't see anyone at the place she's pointing.

"It's always so pleasant chatting with Tomo-chan. I would always forget about the time. Having friends is so good…"

Mikadzuki said it all earnestly, she even blushed a bit when she said it.

"We were just talking about that time in our junior high school year we went to the amusement park, and some guys were trying to hit on us, and how we met our cool new teacher; that's the setting."

"Setting! You just said setting!"

"I never said that! Those things really happened."

"So those things that you were just talking about, how much of it is true?"

"Junior high school year."

"So it was 100% made up?! At the very least the 'went to the amusement park' part should be true….!"

"What's so fun about going to an amusement park alone?"

"You just admitted that you were alone."

"Ah, that doesn't count. It's because Tomo-chan is so cute that if we go to an amusement park together, we'd be bothered by jerks for sure. Therefore we can only go to the amusement park in my mind."

"You actually said that your air friend went to the amusement park in your mind…"

She was a goner…if I didn't do something soon…

"What's with that expression of yours?"

Mikadzuki looked straight at me.

"No, that…."

I hurriedly took a step back.

"If you want to chat with friends why don't you just go and make friends?...I mean real friends, not air friends…"

I cut to the chase and pointed out the core issue.

But Mikadzuki snorted at my suggestion.

“Huh, that’s easier said than done.”

Wow.

She was so frank about it that I was left speechless.

And then Mikadzuki looked at me even more pointedly.

“Hey, now that I look closer, aren’t you the transfer student that ’s always alone in the classroom?”

You only noticed who you were talking to now?!

“You aren't in any position to lecture others about making friends, transfer student.”

“It’s been a month since I started attending this school. Stop calling me transfer student.”

Mikadzuki fell silent after hearing my complaint.

“…Your name?”

She didn’t even know my name. Damn it.

“…Kodaka Hasegawa.”

I dispiritedly told her my name.

"Kodaka eh?...Huh. You are not in a position to lecture others about making friends Kodaka."

"What's up with calling me by my first name…"

"Huh? What's wrong?"

Mikadzuki looked unconcerned.

"…Nothing."

The last time I was called that name was by my former classmates at my old school. It had been so long since someone my age had called me that, I felt a little happy.

Meanwhile, Mikadzuki continued on with her sad look.

"…It's been a month and you still haven't made any friends. You must be so lonely."

"I don't want to hear that from someone who has an air friend!"

Mikadzuki sighed lightly.

"Are you saying Tomo-chan is dumb? Tomo-chan is cute, smart , athletic, friendly, sociable, good at listening and…she would never betray me."

I could tell when she got to the last part she said it slightly emotionally.

"Air friends are good, why don't you make one as well?"

"No thanks. I would be stepping into a realm outside of human sanity if I did that."

"The way you said that makes it sounds like I'm done for as a human."

I quietly averted my eyes from Mikadzuki.

Mikadzuki started to blush again, and then she muttered

"…I know. I know I am running away, I know that. But it can't be helped; I don't know how to make friends…"

She sulkily said.

'I don't know how to make friends' as I felt the same way myself I remained silent.

"What do I have to do to make… friends."

I sighed and muttered.

Mikadzuki sighed as well.

"…So Kodaka, you didn't make any friends at your old school either?"

I shook my head.

"Actually I did."

"Huh?"

She looked skeptical.

"It's true. By coincidence, I had an interesting kid sitting beside me. Because of that he was very popular, so naturally people formed a circle around him and hung out together."

"Fuhuh… so did you talk to that classmate of yours from time to time after you had switched?"

"…"

My eyes drifted away.

"…On my last day everyone went to a restaurant to hold a farewell party. At that time everyone was like 'if you pass by here don't forget to tell us' and 'remember to send me a message'… they did say those things…"

"In other words, when you switched schools they dumped you."

Mikadzuki blurted the truth out without hesitation.

"…You may say that they were friends, but that's only wishful thinking on your part."

As she continued with her jabs I became downcast.

"…By the way, when the bill arrived at our table it was split; they didn't even treat me at my own farewell party…"

Even Mikadzuki looked like she pitied me.

I snapped out of it and said,

"But what happened in the past is not important; what is important is the present and the future!"

"…So what?"

"So…"

"…"

"…"

Silence again.

"...How about we ask others to be our friends like normal people?"

In response, Mikadzuki again snorted at my suggestion.

"Those kinds of things only happen in TV shows, and even then , I don't get it. Do other people magically become your friend just because they accept? Even if you are someone who is like a stranger to them? And what happens after becoming friends, can they go on being friends with you even when you guys don't have a common conversation topic?"

"…Well, I agree with you on that part."

"Right? Ah yes."

Mikadzuki clapped her hands together.

"You got a good idea?"

"Yes."

She confidently nodded.

"How about we pay cash to keep friends? Physical things are more enticing than mere verbal agreement."

"That's way too pathetic!"

"'Stay together in school for a thousand yen, includes food and drinks.' How's that?"

"Love contract…No, friendship contract?!"

"You catch on pretty quickly. What a funny joke. Yes, a contract ."

Mikadzuki didn't look excited at all. She blankly said,

"…If paying cash directly doesn't work how about we buy some games?"

"Games?"

"If you have the newest video games in your home, then perhaps you can stand out and attract others to be your friends, with things like Virtualboy and NeoGeo."

"What are Virtualboy and NeoGeo?"

I was not familiar with those foreign words.

"I just listed out some of the names of the video consoles that I know. 'Virtual' and 'Neo', when you hear these terms, don't you feel energized?"

"They're good names, but…I've never heard of them. Ah well, whatever, who cares. In any case only grade school boys would fall for video games, don't you think?"

"…I suppose."

Mikadzuki looked regretful, and then she said,

"…It's not like I need to make friends anyway."

"What?"

"…I don't feel bad because I have no friends. I just don't want other kids in school to look down on me and go 'that kid doesn't have any friends, how sad.'"

"Ah, I see."

Everyone implies having friends is a good thing and so they think that not having a friend is a bad thing.

But you know what; I think there is something wrong with that conjecture.

"I don't mind if I'm alone. When I face other kids in school it's enough if you only deal with them when the need arises."

The way she said it, it gives me a feeling that she is being unreasonably stubborn.

"At least that's better than having hollow friendships."

And then she bitterly sneered.

"Everyone is like that okay? How many people do you think exist in this world that are bonded together, not by shallow friendships, but by real sincere friendship?"

"…"

To me, who lost all contact with my friends just because I changed schools, I cannot deny what she said.

"…Even so, I still want to make real friends."

"Fuuhuh…"

I insisted, and Mikadzuki gave a very gentle response.

"…So what do you think you should do? Methods that would quickly make you friends."

"Me?"

I silently thought and after some hesitation I said,

"…How about if I join a club?"

"Club?"

"As you work alongside other members you are bound to find some common interests. Knowing each other better through club activities doesn't sound bad."

I think that's a good, realistic idea.

For Mikadzuki, since she is alone here after school, chances are she is not in any club as well.

"Rejected."

Mikadzuki became irritated and rejected my proposal.

"Why?"

"It's embarrassing."

"…Hey!"

I stared at her, she looked back at me and continued,

"Think about it, we're already in June of our second year. For most clubs their internal relations are already cast. Wouldn't you feel embarrassed if you just charged in and joined them?"

"That's true. You have a point."

"Right?!"

Mikadzuki was happy for some strange reason.

"Even so, I can't advance until I get over that stumbling block."

I said.

"So do you have anything you are good at Kodaka…? Anything that you have practiced since first year, a skill that nobody can beat you at?"

Mikadzuki suddenly asked.

I thought about it for a second.

"…No, I don't."

I vaguely answered. A small smile appeared on Mikadzuki's annoyed face.

"Say that you join a club, you would stir up the already settled interpersonal dynamic in the club. All this just because you want to 'make friends', and for that you mess up the team dynamic. Finally, you are a newbie without any outstanding ability… Who would welcome someone like that?"

"Ugh…."

I groaned.

I couldn't think of a single retort.

Inappropriate motive, lack of ability, and finally, bungled teamwork. The effect is magnified by the fact that I am a transfer student.

And then Mikadzuki murmured,

"…But club activities…club activities…"

Mikadzuki looked like she was giving it some intense thought,

"-That's right, club activities!"

She yelled out.

"…?"

I was bewildered but Mikadzuki just smiled at me confidently.

She was so cute when she laughed, but only when she laughed.

Afterward Mikadzuki walked straight out of the classroom.

I didn't quite understand what was going on, but I knew that staying in the classroom alone was pointless-so I picked up my PE uniform and went home.

After I got home and finished my dinner, I took out my textbooks from my backpack.

"Haah…"

I sighed as I opened my English textbook.

I hated English class.

Not because I am bad at it.

My mother is British so in fact English is my specialty.

I didn't suck at it yet I hated the class, to be more exact, sometimes in English class you need to 'do English dialogues with people you hang out with' or 'practice with your friends', and I hated that.

To someone who has no friends, I became gloomy whenever I was forced into those groups.

By the way, due to similar reasons, I hated PE class.

I, Kodaka Hasegawa, have been transferring schools all over Japan thanks to my father's work. However my dad started work overseas a month ago. Because of this, during the middle of May of my second year, I returned to my old home in Tokyo city for the first time in 10 years.

Furthermore, because my parents are old friends with the school principal, I was put into this Saint Chronica school.

And so, I started to hang out around the campus.

How could I put it… juvenile delinquent? Gangster? That's what others think of me as.

The cause of that is mostly because of my looks.

As I mentioned my mom is British. She has beautiful blonde hair.

As her son, I am also blonde, but my hair is not pleasant like my mom's. My hair has many copper color patches, like they've been burnt. All in all, the gloomy coloring only succeeds in making other people uncomfortable.

So no one ever thinks my hair color is natural.

If I didn't explicitly say it, people who saw me would think that I am an example of a 'delinquent teenager who wanted to go to a hair salon to dye his hair blonde, but lacked the money to do so. So instead he bought a self-dye set from a street vendor, tried to dye it himself, and failed.'

In addition, besides my hair color, I got most of my facial features from my Japanese father. My irises are black and my facial features are all Japanese-like. My eyes also look a bit vicious.

Back when I was in junior high there were countless occasions where I was just acting normally, yet others asked me why I was glaring at them.

Saint Chronica is well-known for its disciplined students. True to the rumour, compared to all the previous schools I attended, the

students were all very calm. Is it because none of them have ever been bothered by delinquents, or is it because there were no delinquents in the area? I can only guess.

And then there is the fact that…I was late on my first day. I guess making that gigantic retarded mistake is part of the reason as well.

It happened a month ago.

I knew that as a transfer student, a first impression is very important, and that I couldn't be late. So I left the house two hours (at 6 o'clock) prior to the start of class.

It takes ten minutes to go from my house to the station; if I take the bus, it will take twenty-five minutes. When I got to the bus station before six thirty, I was the only person who was wearing a Saint Chronica's uniform.

I sure was early, I thought. So I boarded the bus that usually heads towards Sawara Kita (where the school is at) [4].

And so I was onboard that bus for almost an hour, in other words the bus never made it to the 'Saint Chronica' bus station. I knew something was wrong, but because the bus was packed with salarymen, I didn't have a chance to ask the bus driver. At the same time I felt shy asking a random stranger on the bus, so I went all the way to the final stop.

After all the passengers got off the bus, I finally summoned enough courage to ask the bus driver. It was then that I found out

that the bus was destined for 'Sagara Kita', not 'Sawara Kita'. Aside from the fact that the two places sounded almost the same, they were both located north. You couldn't tell them apart.

So I got on the returning bus, stayed in it for another hour, returned to the stop near my house, and waited for the correct one. Again, there wasn't a single Saint Chronica student at the stop because rush hour had passed. I even waited 20 minutes for the correct bus.

On my first day I was already late for my class. When I finally arrived at the school, I wanted to cry.

Because the homeroom teacher had already gone to teach in another class, I had no choice but to barge into the classroom in the middle of the first period. So there I was standing alone in the middle of the classroom; my new classmates all looked at me strangely.

I was a bit red in my eyes from the tears and was shaking badly. I tried to camouflage my nervousness by squinting my eyes and suppressing my voice. I coolly said 'I'm a transfer student. My name is Kodaka Hasegawa.' My classmates became unsettled from what I had said. The social teacher, who looked a bit fragile, looked shaken as well. He let me sit in an empty seat.

After the first period ended, no one came to try to talk to me.

Usually when you have a new kid in your class you would ask him or her stuff like 'where did you live', 'what do you like', and ' body measurements'. I even took the pain to prepare some funny

and witty answers beforehand, so that I could leave a good 'what a funny guy' impression in everyone's mind. I was confident that I could answer them beautifully, especially those dumb questions about body measurements. Even now whenever I remember it I laugh. It was a wasted effort.

And this continued on for a month.

I, who had suffered a huge setback at first, have not found a chance to redeem myself.

In English class my partner had always been the teacher (an American, he seemed to take a special interest in me because of my proper pronunciation). In PE class I always formed groups with a kid left over from other classes (but it was clear to me that he was afraid of me as well). During passing practice in soccer, people seldom passed the ball to me. No one ever shouted my name and passed the ball to me. Sometimes there were kids who unintentionally passed the ball to me, but then they would become uncomfortable and actually apologize. Whenever that happened I would become very uncomfortable as well, nod at them and say ' Aah…'. Once I tried to smile and say 'No problem', the person gasped and looked terrified. And on the next day's lunch break, he gave me a bottle of juice and begged me to forgive him.

I always ate my lunch by myself in the classroom.

There was this other time when I went to buy bread, a girl from another class sat in my seat. When I came back she, along with her

friends she was eating with, hurriedly ran out of the classroom. To a teenage boy, having girls running away from you can be a very traumatic experience. That night in the bathroom I cried.

These kind of things had happened multiple times already. Whenever I recalled them, I would feel traumatized by the experience. A few more times and I would reach my limit.

I tried to read books and study in the library and the classroom to present a 'sophisticated' image, but that didn't have much of an effect.

I cried as I finished my homework (if I wrote a cell phone novel called 'The Tearful Youth Story' my tragic circumstance would sell very well).

At that moment, I remembered the conversation I had had with Mikadzuki after school.

A tragic classmate that happily chats with her air friend.

She was so cute too… what a waste.

But air friend huh… she seemed pretty happy there…

No!

I was actually seriously considering getting an air friend! I pulled my cheeks with my hands and said to myself,

"No, no way! If I do that I would be done for as well."

I needed to come up with a good way to change the situation.

…I originally thought joining a club would be a good idea.

In truth, I had been thinking about it before I talked to Mikadzuki.

But just as she said, I didn't have the courage to intrude into an already established club. Now compound that with what she had said today; I would be the new guy who befuddles relations in the club. It's logical that I wouldn't be popular. In fact, if they deny my application (I didn't even dare to think about it) I would not be able to stand up ever again.

"Haah……"

The mere thought was enough to strangle me.

Since I was done with my homework I should take a bath now and go to sleep early…

On the following day, during the lunch break.

Just as I was eating lunch by myself in the classroom, Mikadzuki suddenly walked in to stand in front of me.

"Kodaka come here."

She still had that annoyed look on her face. Without waiting for my response, she walked outside the classroom.

"What? Hey?! Wait!"

I sheepishly followed her.

Right after I stepped outside the classroom, it suddenly became a lot noisier.

With me following her, she quickly walked to the far corner of the school building, an unpopular resting platform.

When I finally caught up, she suddenly turned around and said,

"All the paperwork is ready."

What was she talking about?

"…Paperwork?"

"The paperwork to start a new club!"

"A new club?"

"Aah, see, if you can't join an already established club, why don't you just start one yourself?"

I finally realized this was a continuation of yesterday's conversation after school.

"…Ah, the talk about making friends. That's one way to do it I suppose. If it's a brand new club there would be no established relationships to worry about."

But it wouldn't work if there was no one in the club to start a relationship with.

Because you don't want to get in the way of interpersonal relationships in an existing club, you start a club yourself. Doesn't that sort of defeat the purpose?

"…Wait a second. You just said 'All the paperwork is ready.'"

"That's what I said."

"…And what sort of club is that?"

I asked anxiously. Mikadzuki confidently proclaimed,

"The 'Neighbours Club'"

"Neighbours Club?"

She nodded.

"In accordance with the teachings of Christianity, our club strives to become good neighbors to our fellow students both by deepening our friendships with them, and by making sincere efforts to better ourselves by adapting to a variety of situations."

"That sounds so… suspicious…"

I noted.

I couldn't tell what the club was for!

"And you're telling me that with such a half-baked reason, your application was approved?"

"No matter how nice or naughty you are, this school always sees goodness in you. In the officials' minds, as long as you fluff what you say with the spirit of Christianity, or the teachings of Jesus, or the kindness of Mary, they would often misunderstand your intention. Religion can be so careless."

I think Mikadzuki had just said something that would anger every single devoted Christian in the world.

"…You finished all the paperwork in one single day? You sure are one motivated individual."

I commented with astonishment in my voice.

If you can become that active, why didn't you join a normal club in the first place?

"I am especially talented at boring and monotonous things such as filling forms and writing proposals, things that I can leave behind once they are done."

"Is that a talent?"

"Yes. I am also good at the TV shopping channel."

For some reason, Mikadzuki seemed pleased with herself. She started to nod her head in agreement.

Can you be good at the TV shopping channel?

…Although I am terrified of phoning other people.

"So, this Neighbours Club, what is it actually for?"

Mikadzuki answered my question with a straightforward answer.

"To make friends of course."

"…That's not what I had in mind."

"And then you can start making friends with kids who looked down on you before because you had no friends, and one day you may find what you call 'true friends'! Aren't I smart?"

Mikadzuki said proudly.

I sighed.

"…Whatever… do whatever you want."

But Mikadzuki was surprised at my reaction and said,

"Why are you talking as if you are discussing another person's issue? You are already one of the members!"

"What?!"

I raised my voice in surprise, Mikadzuki remained unfazed and continued,

"You left the school all by yourself, so I filled out your application form for you. Remember to thank me."

"What the-?!"

"The teachers are very concerned with you as well. The second I said 'Kodaka Hasegawa wants to become a member of the club', the teachers became very happy. One of them said, "I pray that he experiences the true caring spirit of Christianity through his club activities. May he see the error of his ways and repent."

"What 'error of his ways'!? I'm not a delinquent!"

Even the teachers think I'm one. I was crushed.

"As I said, member Kodaka, we will commence our club activity after school starting today."

She turned around and left.

Well at least I was sure of one thing; one of the reasons why Mikadzuki didn't have friends was because she doesn't listen to other people at all.

No matter what. So that was that.

That's how I, Kodaka Hasegawa, and a strange kid called Yozora Mikadzuki, became involved in Neighbours Club's strange activities.

Yozora

After we got out of class I followed Mikadzuki to a chapel inside school.

It was a huge building with a cross decoration placed on top of the roof. Inside the building were rooms for ceremonies like masses and weddings. It also had typical church facilities which included a confession box. Finally, it had seminar and self-meditation rooms.

One of them, the 'meeting room #4', had become the Neighbor's Club's activity room.

It was a beautifully decorated western style room the size of around eight tatami[5]. There was a small round table, some sofas, and a small metal shelf.

This place seemed more like a salon than a church's meeting room.

Unlike myself, once Mikadzuki entered the room, she immediately began to relax on the sofa.

"…Can we really use this room?"

"The consultant teacher said it's fine, so yes of course."

Mikadzuki answered as if it were obvious.

"Consultant teacher?"

Right, this was a recognized club after all; it made sense that the club had a consultant teacher assigned to it.

As I slowly sat down on the sofa across from Mikadzuki I slowly said,

"…Someone is actually willing to be a consultant for this dubious club…"

"This club isn't dubious. 'As dictated by the teachings of Christianity, those who attend the same school should treat their fellow students as their kind neighbors- with acquitted friendship, sincerity, and engage in caring and meaningful exchanges.' All activities are carried out to uphold this clear and outstanding goal. "

"Huh, it sounds fishy no matter how many times I hear it… so what kind of person will come to enlighten us on how to make friends?"

"Sister Maria-sensei."

"What…"

I had never heard of that name.

As a Christian school there were a few assisting clergy-members sent by the church here. They were mostly here as teachers for Theology and Ethics classes.

Since I was not very interested in what Christianity had to say, I opted not to take any of those classes. I originally thought I would live a nun-free school life. I was surprised that I would make connections with them in the most unsuspecting place.

"A nun called Maria huh… I do feel a bit of something. I'm not very sure, but I think I will be able to learn some valuable hints from her."

"Aah, that's just your imagination."

Mikadzuki asserted.

"…My imagination?"

"…Maria-sensei doesn't have friends either."

I thought she had just pointed out a critical flaw in her scheme.

"…Why-why would you get someone like that to be the consultant?"

"I am very bad at talking to people who have lots of friends… on the other hand, I can converse normally with people who have no friends, like you Kodaka."

Yozora Mikadzuki: she was a more regretful character than I had ever thought possible.

"…In other words, you had no choice but to seek help from a teacher who is in the same situation as you?"

"That's right."

She cockily replied and imperiously relaxed herself into the sofa .

"Ah well, it would suck to spend time having a boring teacher lecturing us. I guess that's the price to pay for having her agree to let us use this meeting room."

"…That's one way to interpret what she said."

She agreed for now.

"So, what sort of concrete club preparation do you have in mind ?"

"Before that, we need to get more members." Mikadzuki replied .

"Aah, I see…"

Since the reason for her trying to make friends within the club is to not have others think that she is lonely, getting more members was naturally her top priority. I, however, thought the criteria for friends should have been 'quality over quantity'.

Mikadzuki took out a roll of papers from her bag.

"Let's make a recruiting poster first."

"Okay."

She finished it quite quickly.

Mikadzuki handed me a notice.

“I think I did pretty well.”

“Hmm.”

I took a glance at it.

“……”

And... I was flabbergasted.

How should I describe it. It’s that thing; yeah it must be that thing. To sum it up, the poster is really ‘something’.

隣人部

とにかく臨機応変に隣人
とも善き関係を築くべく
からだと心を健全に鍛え
たびだちのその日まで、
共に想い募らせ励まし合い
皆の信望を集める人間になろう！

活動場所：礼拝堂談話室４

"…What is this?"

"It's a notice, duh. I will post this on the school bulletin board now."

"Eh…"

When she saw my incredulous face, she became unhappy and asked,

"…What, you think there's a problem?"

"I don't see how you can think there is nothing wrong with it. The poster doesn't even say what the club is for. You won't be able to recruit any new members with this thing."

"Fuun~, you are too naive Kodaka."

For some reason Mikadzuki looked at me as if I were an idiot.

"Try reading the paragraph diagonally."

"Diagonally…?"

I skeptically stared at the notice.

"Ah!"

"Get it?"

Mikadzuki lightly smiled.

"…Well, I guess you can say I get it.."

If you read the paragraph starting from its top left corner and worked your way down diagonally-

We
Are
Looking
For
New
Friends

【
と【
か【
ただ【
共に【
皆のを【

と = ‘Friends Wanted’

[‘We all are friendly and flexible neighbors ,
so let’s start a friendly relation with others!
To answer the call to train your mental health,
Work together today to start on this journey,
As we motivate each other with our common ideal,
We will become the most trusted people in the world!]

“…What a subtle hint…”

"It's not a hint."

Mikadzuki looked surprised.

"For a person who keeps on looking for ways to make friends, they will notice the hidden information in this notice. On the other hand, to people who have no social problem, they will just read the paragraph and leave it as such. In other words, we don't need to explicitly write out the embarrassing intention 'friends wanted' yet we can still get people with the same goal to join us."

"Eeh…"

Mikadzuki looked so confident; I was at a loss as to what to say.

By the way, you do realize that this is embarrassing…

"Okay, let's take a hundred steps back and assume that your hypothesis is correct…"

"Why do we need to take a hundred steps back?"

I ignored the puzzled Mikadzuki and continued,

"We'll leave the text alone for now. What is that drawing?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"I am asking because it's not obvious to me at all!"

"Fuun~."

Mikadzuki started smirking at me as if I was the moron here. As if she was patiently and kindly teaching a dummy to understand simple things, she gently explained,

"Wasn't there a folk song about making a hundred friends and eating rice balls together at the peak of Mt. Fuji? That's what I had in mind. I didn't mess around when I drew it."

"…I see…"

"The picture is for people who missed the diagonal sentence. Even if they missed it, they can still realize the intention of this club through this drawing."

"…Okay, let's take a hundred steps back and assume what you said is true."

"Why do we need to take a hundred steps back?"

I again ignored Mikadzuki's question.

"So the people in this drawing are eating… rice balls? Like food ? Why do they have legs and eyes on them?"

"They look cuter that way."

"…I really hate the feeling that my food is going to go berserk whenever I try to bite into it. Don't anthropomorph-ize food…"

"Are you denying rightful honor to these national heroes?"

"National heroes?"

"They are good people who let kids bite off their heads."

"Anpanman?!" [6]

"The ultimate sacrifice they believed in to become your stomach acid. I can resonate with the love and courage they held to their friends."

"Anpanman will only be troubled by your understanding!"

Out of nowhere, Mikadzuki looked at me suspiciously.

"…You know Kodaka, you didn't see the hidden meaning in this paragraph, nor did you understand the true intention behind the drawing. Are you really here to make new friends?"

"I don't want to make friends with people who are tragically talented enough to understand this kind of poster…"

"Huh, you still think that you are the reasonable one here. Kodaka you are a World Genre kind of person." [7]

"You are the last person I want to hear that from."

As Mikadzuki looked at how worn out I was she started to get displeased.

"…I just noticed it, but stop calling me 'you' all the time. It doesn't feel good."

"Eh? Aah… okay."

"Then how about…"

I was always unsure what I should call others.

Should I call them by their last name, full name, or nickname? Should I add 'San'[Mr.] or 'Kun' or 'Chan'? Or should I just use their first name like we are close together?

That's why I usually tried to refer to others by their full name.

"…Then how about….Mikadzuki… -san?"

"Yozora."

Mikadzuki replied sternly.

"Call me by my first name, Yozora."

"O-Okay… then, Yozora."

"Why are you blushing? So disgusting."

Still looking displeased, Mikadzuki irritably stated as such.

Am I the only person who becomes shy whenever one tries to intimately call a girl by her first name?

"…Hey, do you have some sort of nickname? I'm more comfortable with them…"

"It is… was…"

Mikadzuki looked even more annoyed than usual. She said,

"…I had one, but I can't tell you."

"Why?"

I asked, and as if she was about to cry, Mikadzuki looked at me with a lonesome smile.

"Because nicknames are only for friends."

I still didn't understand what Mikadzuki- no, I mean Yozora was thinking.

"…No choice then… Hey, let's post the notice first… Yozora."

Feeling a bit embarrassed, I stood up from the sofa.

The very first activity of the Neighbor's Club...

We finally had classmates that are on a first name basis.

…If we ignore the events that happened between the start and the end and just look at the final result, it's hard to say that we did well.

Sena Kashiwazaki

The day after we posted the notice, after school ended,

Mikadzuki… I mean Yozora and I came to the Neighbor's Club activity room.

Yozora arrogantly relaxed herself onto the sofa, laughed manically and proclaimed,

“Today we will finally start our club activities.”

“Or rather, we will decide what sort of things we will do.”

I still didn’t understand what sort of activities this club was created for. I didn’t know, nor did I have the slightest image in my mind.

In fact one might question the wisdom of me having joined this club in the first place.

“All I’m looking for are friends, so as long as we can get new members it’s be fine by me. In other words, I've done everything I needed to do yesterday already.”

“…No matter how I look at it I still don’t think there is a person in this school who would look at that poster and decide to join the club.”

"You're still saying that? That poster will for sure attract the lost lambs that, up to now, have been continuously in search of friends in this school. I'm sure of it."

"Where on earth do you get your confidence from?"

I was truly astounded by her.

And then, at that instant.

---*Knock knock*

Someone was knocking on the door.

"---?!---!"

Surprised, Yozora and I turned to each other subconsciously.

"It looks like we will be getting ourselves a new member very quickly."

Yozora said victoriously.

"As if. It's probably the consulting teacher or something."

Yozora and I stood up together and opened the door.

Standing in front of us was a blue-eyed blonde female student.

Her body was very slender; her bosom very curvaceous. She had a nice body that was comparable to fashion models. Even

though her eyes looked a bit mean her face was incredibly beautiful. One could feel an aura of elegance around her.

If you compared her to Yozora, whose face is also beautiful (and only the face) but always has herself in a state of melancholy, and always does things recklessly, their difference in gorgeousness was like night and day. She was truly a one-of-a-kind of bishoujo that was rarely seen.

Judging from the color of the school emblem on her uniform, just like us, she was in the second year.

“Is this the Neighbor's Club? I would like to join.”

The girl said.

“No.”

BAM!

KACHAK!

In one smooth action Yozora quickly answered, closed the door, and locked it.

“Eeeeehhh?! Wait, Yozora?!”

Yozora came back to the sofa as if nothing had happened.

“Okay, let’s get started on club activities.”

"No, wait a second! Someone just came here and asked to join the club?! And she is a second year female student! Isn't she the kind of student that would suit you well?"

"Hahaha, what nonsense are you spurting, you dirty-blonde punk. I already have a female friend; Tomo-chan."

Yozora, with a captivating-if-you're-careless smile, started to chat with her air friend.

"Hey hey…"

…Dirty-blonde punk, did she mean me? It's true that my hair color is closer to yellow dirt than gold.

The girl outside was still knocking on the door.

Even though we could sort of hear her slightly furious knocking , the sound insulation of this room was very good. Outsiders would not be able to hear what was being said inside.

Yozora agitatedly stood up again and opened the door.

"Why did you close the door! I want to join the-"

"ALL NORMALS SHOULD GO TO HELL!"

BAM!

KACHAK!

After she said some awful things that a main heroine should never say, Yozora closed the door again.

In the meantime I caught a glimpse of the shocked expression of the girl.

"…Eh, don't tell me you know that girl?"

I again asked Yozora, who just sat back onto the sofa.

"I don't know her personally. Even though I know her name and what she looks like, we've never talked."

As Yozora explained she pulled a small notebook from her bag.

She continued agitatedly.

"2nd year 3rd class, Sena Kashiwazaki… she is the only child of the school president. The guys always follow her like lapdogs trying to please her. And she always acts as if she is a princess, what an annoying person."

"…Ehh, is that so…"

Even though we had never met, my parents and the school president were good friends. I do recall father saying that the president had a daughter that was in the same year as I.

"…I noticed that the president has a Japanese name, but I never thought that his daughter would be a blonde."

When Yozora heard me murmur this to myself she looked at me furiously.

“So what if she is a blonde. All guys are like this, the second they see blond chicks with big boobs, they perversely drool all over themselves. What a bunch of perverts.”

“No, that’s not what I meant…”

Yozora interrupted my explanation.

“Not only does she look ridiculously gaudy, she's got amazing grades, she's a super athlete too. She's been #1 on every one of our final exams ever since last year! What the hell is with that normal!? Why doesn’t she just die!?”

Yozora banged her fists on the round table.

“W-Why are you so mad? Shouldn’t you be proud that someone as amazing as her is in the same school as you?”

“Ha? Are you kidding me?”

“Okay, maybe being proud is a bit too much, but at the very least you should be impressed by her.”

“When you see kids that are the same age as us, living a fulfilling youth, don't you feel disgusted for no apparent reason?”

“Die!”

She was beyond all help…

"Fuun, in any case, why would a realfill woman like her want to join a club like ours? I am sure she is here to mock us. I heard that she has a terrible personality."

"You just said 'a club like ours'…"

I'll just continue with the discussion for now.

"Okay, let's leave the question of whether she is a terrible person aside. Are you sure that she truly has no intention of joining our club?"

My attention shifted to the door again.

Sena Kashiwazaki seemed to have left; I didn't hear any knocks on the door anymore.

But at that moment.

Suddenly I heard a furious banging noise. Something was banging on the windows behind me.

Yozora and I were both taken by surprise. We both looked outside the window.

Sena Kashiwazaki was pressing her face against the glass like a zombie in a movie. She was looking straight into the room.

What a waste of that beautiful face.

"What the hell… is this…"

After we engaged in a silent confrontation for a bit Yozora finally relented and opened the window.

"Why are you being so mean to me? I already said that I want to join the club!"

Sena Kashiwazaki tearfully and angrily yelled with the window half open.

"If you are here to laugh at us, go away."

Yozora was about to close the window but Kashiwazaki quickly held it open and continued:

"I am not here to laugh at anyone! I came here because I saw the poster!"

In that moment Yozora's stiff forehead relaxed a bit; she moved her hands away from the window.

“I WANT TO HAVE FRIENDS AS WELL!”

With the window wide open, Kashiwazaki loudly yelled at us.

“……”

“Chi!” Yozora clicked her tongue in annoyance but she let the girl in anyway.

“Look at me, aren’t I perfect?”

As if we were all nothing compared to her, Kashiwazaki sat down on the sofa and pompously proclaimed.

“……”

I was starting to understand what Yozora meant.

“Smart, athletic, and as you can see, extremely beautiful. All I can say is that I am specially crafted by God to be the most perfect being, don’t you agree? I will give you all the chance to at least complain how the world is unfair, peasants.”

Kashiwazaki stated all this as if it were an obvious truth.

She brushed her golden hair with a hand and put out a pose as if she were a famous person.

"Fuun, more like a crappy milk cow."

Yozora, who was glaring at Kashiwazaki's face, suddenly said.

"Ah, what did the flat-chest just say?"

A desire to kill could be felt from Yozora's eyes.

"…Mine are actually not that small."

"With half-baked breasts like yours, you might as well have none at all."

"…If I kill all the people who have a bigger set than me, then I will be the biggest one. You can be the first sacrifice for my glorious plan."

"Don't."

Because I believed Yozora would actually do that I broke off their argument.

I couldn't predict what Yozora would do with her excessive energy.

"Then, uh… let's talk about the fact that you want to make friends."

Kashiwazaki heard what I said and nodded wildly.

"…Aren't you always surrounded by boys?"

Yozora stared at Kashiwazaki and asked.

"You don't understand. Those guys are just my servants. What I want are friends. It would be even better if they could be girls as well. For example, when you have to cook in cooking class, or have to break into groups in a graduation field trip, when the teacher says 'form a group with your friends', I want friends who can immediately stand with me."

She may have looked very popular and impressive at the onset, but in truth she had her own tough problems.

"… 'Kashiwazaki is so popular with the guys, you should form a group with them gyahaha' I don't want to hear these kinds of revolting things from other people again, so I need friends! I don't ever want to go through a graduation trip where I am treated like extra baggage and can't play alongside my classmates…"

Kashiwazaki explained bitterly.

"…I suppose so. It's true that sometimes I would hear news about how a girl is being outcast by her female classmates for being too beautiful or smart."

"Fuun, I never thought a delinquent like you would understand . So then, hurry up and get on your knees so that I can step on you, or would you rather lick my shoes?"

Kashiwazaki said those strange things and smiled.

Why would I want you to step on me or lick your shoes?

When she saw that I was staring at her, Kashiwazaki tilted her head in puzzlement.

“The boys in my class, whenever I said to let me step on them or tell them to lick my shoes, they would do it without complaint.”

And then, all of a sudden, Kashiwazaki's face suddenly became fearful.

“…Don’t tell me you want to do something even more hardcore ? You are a true delinquent indeed… I- I won’t use my socks to bondage you! You pervert!”

“I am neither a pervert nor a delinquent!”

I countered at the top of my lungs.

…The reason why this person here had no friends, was not because she was too amazing, nor was it because of her popularity with the boys… It was because her personality was too terrible. I finally realized this.

“Fuu… that’s to be expected from someone who could decode the true meaning behind Yozora’s notice…”

“I think you just insulted me with what you just said.”

“You're over-thinking it.”

I disregarded the still grumbling Yozora and continued,

"Hey, with both of you here things will end up nicely then. We'll all have friends we can hang out with, right?"

"Ha?"

"What are you talking about?"

Both Yozora and Kashiwazaki looked surprised.

"…Aah, is it because you two are not in the same class, so you two won't be able to participate together in cooking class and in graduation trips?"

"That's not it!"

They yelled at the same time.

"Why do I need to befriend someone like her?"

"I don't want to be her friend."

They continued on with their clashes.

"…What was that supposed to mean, boob girl?"

"You're the one that needs to be asked, pointy eyes."

"Your eyes are pointy as well."

"My pointy eyes are cute; yours look just like a weasel's."

"Ah, ouch, someone is actually shameless enough to call themselves cute."

"Am I supposed to hold back on what is obviously true?"

"Eh? Why don't you drop dead?"

"Ha? Don't you mean that you, as a human being, are so worthless that you should be gone from this world?"

……

…Yozora did say that they had never talked to one another before…

"How can you two get along so badly when you've never met each other before…"

Kashiwazaki agitatedly flicked her hair over her shoulder.

"This person has a very terrible personality. To someone as perfect as me, she should be on her knees as a lowly peasant."

"You really are retarded, you know."

"Fufufu, I have the highest mark in my grade!"

"Yes, yes, so the Cow Girl-chan is really good at studying. Look at her amazing marks!"

With a mocking expression Yozora clapped at her. Kashiwazaki 's face became bright red and she furiously muttered,

"…Damn you… I will have papa kick you out of the school!"

"Papa? You are not a kid anymore and you still say papa mama, aren't you embarrassed? You're like a little girl that is still sucking milk, wow, you must be a real jewel. Don't you feel ashamed of being alive?"

"…Agu… why you… you really have a horrible personality… …!"

She shook her fists in anger.

When I looked closely she even had tears in her eyes.

She may look arrogant on the outside, but she was surprisingly fragile.

"A-Anyway!"

If this went on any longer the argument might get physical, so I forcefully cut in.

"Aah?"

Both of them, looking as if I had interrupted their girl's fantasy, angrily glared at me. Scary.

"Then, Kashiwazaki, do you really want to join this club?"

If you are going to be this unfriendly all the time, then please spare me.

But,

"Yes I want to join. I even brought the registration application with me."

"Chi…" Yozora clicked her tongue, making no attempt to hide her annoyance.

"…You got something you want to say?"

"Yes. Get out. Ah, my mistake. Drop dead."

"As for me, I hate people who backtrack on their words the most. Even so, I never would have thought that there would be such a horrible woman here."

And then Kashiwazaki clapped her hands together.

"Oh right, the problem would be solved if you quit the club! Good going myself, what a great idea!"

"The club is mine!"

"When did it become yours?"

I stared at her and retorted.

"And to the delinquent over there!"

Kashiwazaki turned to me. As I have said before, I'm not a delinquent.

"From now on please call me Sena. I grant you permission to do so."

"…Why?"

"You call that weasel girl by her first name, but you call me by my last name. Doesn't that mean that in your mind I am ranked below her?"

"…Okay… Sena."

I reluctantly agreed.

Yozora, for some reason, very unhappily took a glance at me. What was that for…

To summarize, this is what happened: on the second day since the establishment of the Neighbor's Club, we got a new member.

…Honestly, the result looks a lot better on paper. In truth, it's very troublesome.

The Hunt

"We need to play games."

Three days after the Neighbor's Club was established,

Yozora suddenly said that.

I was in the clubroom with Yozora. In addition Sena Kashiwazaki, who joined the club yesterday, was also present. Today she had brought a tea set and was pouring tea as Yozora spoke to us.

"Ha? Game?"

Sena replied agitatedly.

"Yozora… only kids would be attracted by games."

After I answered, Yozora once again treated me as a fool.

"You are too naïve, Kodaka. For modern day high school students, Super Famicon and Omega Drive are out of fashion already."

"…What are Super Famicon and Omega Drive[8]?"

"They are just some console names that popped into my mind. Things with the prefix 'Super' or 'Omega' sound pretty impressive ."

"I agree that the names themselves do sound impressive."

"Eh, who cares about them. Back to the topic!"

Yozora slammed her fists on the table.

The shockwave shook the teacup in front of Sena and splashed red tea onto Sena's hands.

"Ah! What are you doing weasel girl?!"

"Sheesh…it didn't flip…"

"That was intentional?! Damn you!"

"Hm? What do you mean? Anyway, back to games."

Yozora ignored Sena's tearful complaints and started to look for something in her bag.

"The most popular game these days… is this!"

Yozora took out a handheld game console from her bag.

Even I knew what that was;

Play Station Portable

My younger sister had one too.

"Yesterday when I went to a family restaurant by myself, the table behind my seat was obnoxiously loud. When I turned around I saw four high school kids happily playing this."

I had never gone to a family restaurant alone… I'm getting off topic.

"It seems that these days it is common for high school students to play online handheld games in restaurants or something."

"So what about it?"

Again Yozora ignored Sena's question; she turned on her PSP.

It was probably in sleep mode; the game screen quickly appeared.

"The high school kids were playing this game, 'Monster Kariudo'[TL note: 'Hunter']. From my research this is the most popular game these days."

In my last school I saw people playing it, so I was familiar with it as well.

Monster Kariudo; nicknamed 'MonKari'.

In this game you play as a hunter in a fantasy world. In plains, deserts and mountains you hunt and fight monsters.

"You can co-op play with other people. Average players can also seek help from experts. If you play this game it shouldn't take

long before your relationships with other people improve. Also you can trade items –'I want this item; do you have it?' 'I can trade this valuable item for your particular item.' I think that by doing things like this you will have opportunities to talk with other people."

"…Now that you mention it, the girls in my class play this as well. These days even girls play video games."

Sena said.

"So, our club activity would be to play this game to grind our skills, gain valuable items, and make friends?"

Yozora heard what I said and nodded in affirmation.

Was this game really that easy? I still had some reservations about that. Well in any case it's good that we finally had a concrete club activity.

"So next Monday bring a PSP and the MonKari disc."

"Fuun, this can't be helped. Although I have no interest in games, gaming is too much work, it irritates me to follow your idea, your attitude also pisses me off, in fact your mere existence pisses me off, but I will play with you."

"Ah, mosquito." (Monotonic tone)

WHAM

As Sena nodded her head and whined Yozora smacked her nose .

"That hurt!"

Sena rubbed her nose in tears and protested.

"Enough with your direct attacks Yozora… ah, do you have a PSP Sena?"

I asked. Sena tearfully answered.

"Why would I have one. But I can just find a random guy in my class and tell him to lend his to me."

"…Damn you, boob girl."

And as always, after Sena had answered in a self-centered way as if it went without saying, Yozora cursed.

On Monday.

As promised I had brought a PSP and the game disc.

I borrowed the PSP from my sister; the game I bought myself.

Yozora and Sena also brought their respective setups.

"So are you familiar with the controls?"

"Yeah."

I nodded in response to Yozora's question.

"Huh, I was very busy, so I only played for a bit. Since this game is so popular I should have no trouble playing it. Well, it's just a game, a toy made for little kids."

As per usual Sena wasn't being straightforward and said the opposite of what she meant.

"Then let's get started."

Yozora announced, and we each turned on our PSPs.

"Who will be the host?"

Sena asked.

"How about the person with the highest level?"

I nodded in agreement to Yozora's suggestion.

In this game, the host can accept missions. The missions are the usual 'kill monster xxx' or 'retrieve item xxx' variety. The host could invite other players to join the challenge.

As you complete more missions, your hunter would upgrade its level. And from that you can receive even more missions.

As you advance to higher levels, the missions would become more difficult. But at the same time, the drop rate for rare items would increase as well. Therefore it was better for higher level players to host.

"Kodaka and Cow; what levels are you two at?"

…And at some point, Yozora had skipped over the words 'boob ' or 'girl' and called Sena a 'cow' directly.

Even though nicknames were usually reserved between close friends I didn't think Yozora's 'cow' and 'boob girl' could be counted in that category; they were more like insults, I believed.

"I am still at level 1."

I had spent 5 hours playing the game for the past 2 days. Solo play was indeed challenging, so hadn't completed many missions.

By the way, the highest level is 5. When you reach that, all the missions you get are tough ones that are impossible to finish solo.

"Fuu, I am at level 3."

Yozora proudly said.

Right from the start of the game, the enemies are tough, and they often gang up on you. Thus it's not easy to reach level 3 all by yourself; I could see why she was proud.

"I am at level 5."

As Sena stroked her shiny hair and answered in a strangely smug way.

"5?!"

Yozora and I were shocked.

"This game is so simple for me. Even with gaming I am a genius , is there any limit to my perfection?"

"Be quiet, shut up, go to hell you raw meat girl, go get baked into cooked meat and die."

As always, when Sena starts to bolster about how amazing she was, Yozora would, as if it was a reflexive motion like breathing, start cursing at Sena.

By the way, both 'raw meat' and 'cooked meat' are items in the game. Eating cooked meat can recover your stamina while consuming raw meat will lead to a stomach ache.

"…Sena you said you 'played for a bit'? What did you do to become this advanced?"

"I-I didn't play that much!"

Slightly blushing, Sena repeated her explanation; but It was obvious that she was lying.

Among the missions in the game, there are a few long ones that will take up to an hour to complete. Even if she finished all the missions in her first try it must have taken her tens of hours to reach level 5.

“Let me see your play time Meat.”

Yozora snatched Meat’s - I mean Sena’s PSP away from her hands.

“Ah, wait! Don’t look!”

“Play time 53 hours… what?!”

Yozora was stunned.

“And you have so many items that I’ve never seen in your inventory! And your equipment is so cute! You are just a piece of raw meat, don’t get so cocky!”

Yozora threw the PSP back to Sena.

“What are you doing you idiot! ~~~~~~~?!”

As Sena tried to catch her flying PSP her legs hit the table.

In tears, she painfully crouched onto the floor.

Perhaps Yozora had finally realized that she went overboard, she handed Sena a handkerchief- that's what I originally thought. But instead Yozora suddenly raised the handkerchief and roughly rubbed it against Sena's face.

"Wait, stop you stupid weasel!"

…A few seconds later Yozora stopped the rubbing. Sena shakily stood up.

And I saw a pair of deep black-eyes.

Because Yozora had rubbed off the makeup on Sena's face the black-eyes had surfaced.

"Since you got back home last Friday you've been playing the game nonstop through the weekend, haven't you."

"Ughh…"

Under Yozora's charges Sena groaned.

"Fuun… this game is so simple, huh…"

As Yozora glared at Sena, Sena's face quickly turned red.

"E-Even a lion doesn't hold back when it hunts! A weasel like you wouldn't understand!"

Ah, there we go again.

"Anyway, I will be the host okay! Let's first do a level 3 mission to warm up, so suit up people!"

"Fuun, gosh I am a grown up already, but I guess I will play this simple game with a game-crazed little girl."

As Yozora continuously lashed out, ranting, she started to set up her PSP.

I also connected to Sena's PSP.

…Even though I was still not sure what to make of Yozora, in my mind, my perception of Sena had changed a bit.

For this 'simple game' she had sacrificed all her sleeping hours to play it nonstop. This wasn't something a normal person could pull off.

Although her mouth was a little thorny, the way she earnestly prepared for this club activity; that was actually pretty likable.

…But if she kept on skipping rest, her body would weaken, so she should hold back a bit.

After all three of us were ready we used the village as our base of operations and moved towards the mountain area to search for monsters.

As your level increased your choice of hunting grounds increased as well. For this particular map, I had been here when I did my first bunch of missions.

Each of us, represented by our characters, came to the starting area of the mission.

In this game, you could set your hunter's gender, face, body size, hair style, hair color and so forth. Also depending on your equipment, your character would also change its appearance.

Sena and Yozora's characters were both females. Both of them have equipped their characters with flashy and powerful weapons and armour. My character, compared to them, looked a lot weaker.

"What's up with that?"

Yozora mischievously snickered.

"It can't be helped. I just started playing this game."

"I don't mean the equipment; what's up with your character?"

"……"

I chose a male character with light blond long hair.

"Heh, don't tell me Kodaka wants to become a long haired foreigner?"

Sena joined the mocking session.

"The face is the feminine one as well. Tragically it's nothing like the real person."

"The character's name is 'Hawk', that's so lame. Is it because your name is 'Taka' [TL note: 'eagle'] that you picked Hawk?"

"Who cares! It's a game, there is bound to be a bit of difference between game and reality!"

I heatedly shouted at these two people.

"Just a bit?"

"……"

By the way, Sena's character's face, hair, and body were the spitting image of her. The name was also 'Sena'. How narcissistic could this person be anyway.

Yozora's character's hair and body were similar to the real thing as well. But the eyes were a lot softer, and the face was a smiling, child-like face. Her name was 'Night'. Because her name was Yozora [TL note: 'Night sky'] so she named her character 'Night', wasn't that equally as lame?

I countered and mocked her ‘Oh so you wish you had an adorable face like that huh, hehe’. Of course I was only tempted to say it, I didn’t actually tell her that…

“Then let’s start the hunt.”

Yozora announced. She controlled ‘Night’ to move forward.

At the next moment-

Zubasyu!!

‘Sena’ used her body-sized broadsword and slashed Night’s exposed back!

“What?!”

Yozora shrieked from the unexpected attack. At the same time blood spurt out from Night and she fell to the ground.

The sword did live up to its level 5 requirement; Its attack power couldn’t be overstated. Night was killed in one hit.

All three game screens turned dark and we returned to our initial rallying point. (I hadn’t even moved since I entered the mission.)

In this game, not only players could attack enemies, they could also attack their fellow players in their party.

If we died three times then we failed the mission.

"What are you doing Meat!?"

"Aha, sorry. I sort of mixed up my controls. Okay, let's get on with the hunt!"

Sena answered brightly.

MonKari required its player to master the use of every single button on the PSP. It was a very complex set of procedures. So it was impossible for an advanced level 5 player like Sena to accidentally mess up that amateurishly.

…Did she play 50 plus hours just so she could backstab Yozora?

In online games, there were indeed people who find joy in killing other players, but not in MonKari!

"…If it's just a mix up then it's all right…okay, let's go…"

Yozora held back on her urge to kill and softly said.

'Sena' went first and my 'Hawk' closely followed her.

But for some reason Night walked away from us. When she was a suitable distance from us-

"Ah-, I pressed the wrong button- (Monotonic tone)"

She shot an arrow at Sena.

Busuu!

Sena's head was impaled by the arrow. It started to bleed profusely.

"Hey! That was obviously intentional!"

Sena yelled.

"I wasn't aiming at you. I sincerely hope that you stop your baseless accusations."

"…Huh, since you were polite enough, I will forgive you this time."

Although the arrow was still in her head 'Sena' managed to stand up quickly. She applied some healing potion to herself.

Her defense was very high, so it wasn't a one hit kill.

"Chi…."

"You just clicked your tongue didn't you?! So that was intentional!"

"Hey! Now is not a good time to argue!"

Perhaps they had smelled blood… I guess. Four huge wolves came out from a dark region near us.

I hurriedly controlled 'Hawk' into a battle position.

"Huh, stay back Kodaka. Let me take care of this trash."

Right after she said that, 'Sena' rushed towards the wolf pack with her broadsword.

Zubaa!</wiki> A wolf was killed by a single swing.

"Ahaha, how dare you try to challenge me you useless bunch of half-breed dogs! You are ten billion years too early dumbasses!"

The second one was taken care of as well. 'Sena' turned her attention to the third one.

Sena was quite skillful at the game, I noticed.

The broadsword was powerful, but its attack speed was slow. Faced with that disadvantage, Sena hadn't missed a single slash against the agile wolves.

"Last one!"

Just as 'Sena' rushed towards the last wolf-

Dosu!*Dosu*!*Dosu*!

The head got one. The back got two. Something got shot… Sena' s blood squirted out and she fell to the ground.

The culprit Yozora laughed crazily.

"Good! My careful effort at aiming has not gone- ah no… I mean, I was trying to cover you but my shot missed. Sorry."

Sena's HP ran out and our screens turned dark again- we were now back at the rally point.

"You attacked me intentionally!"

The instant we returned to the rally point 'Sena' hacked her sword at Night.

Zubisyu!

Night had died.

Since we died three times in a row our mission failed. We returned from the hunting ground to the village.

"…Why you… Meat…"

"What's wrong with you, stupid weasel…"

Both people, with twitching faces, stared angrily at one another.

"Eh… this is a co-op game so let's work together, okay?"

In any case, I tried to mediate their conflict.

Surprisingly, they both agreed.

"…Yeah, let's work together in the next mission."

"…Huh, be grateful that a level 5 genius beautiful hunter is willing to help a crap hunter like you…"

With unease in my heart, we restarted the mission.

"Dieeeeeeee!"

My unease lasted for only 3 seconds.

I didn't think they would ever get along with each other. The moment the screen finished loading 'Sena' slashed her sword against Night.

"Ha, weak!"

Night rolled to the side and dodged Sena's attack.

After she distanced herself from 'Sena' she pulled out her bow and started shooting.

Sena successfully evaded all but one of the arrows- It hit Sena's stomach.

Just as 'Sena' resumed her chase towards Night, the character stopped running.

"Wh-what?! Why am I paralyzed?! You actually shot poison arrows at your own ally! That's unbelievable!"

As a contrast to Sena's painful moaning, Yozora's face became one of a crazed killer's.

"I have not ever even once considered you as being on my side, you damn piece of meat!"

As 'Sena' became immobile with the toxin Night shot a few more arrows at her.

'Sena' died and the screen went dark again.

"You weasel! I'm going to hunt you down!"

When the game restarted 'Sena' lurched towards Night.

After she evaded a wave of attacks Yozora grinned madly.

"So that piece of meat could actually move, how annoying. Let me grind you into mincemeat!"

"As a lowly beast you think you can challenge god? Let me teach you what regret is!"

Yozora and Sena resumed their hunt against one another.

"Die! One can only experience the reality of living by killing others!"

Yozora yelled out a line from Ningen Shikkaku. At the same time without holding back she used her arrays of valuable items like poison darts, explosives, traps and so forth to limit Sena's movement, then sniped her with her bow.

Yozora's trap laying techniques were really brilliant. For example when 'Sena' ducked an incoming arrow she would fall into an animal trap waiting next to her. Or Yozora would lay trap holes at blind spots in the map. The methods she used were completely useless against monsters; they were special techniques that would only work against human opponents.

"Pieces of shit should act like what you are; kneel down and lick my toes!"

Her opponent 'Sena' also yelled out a line that seemed to belong to an evil overlord. She had her special recovery potions and rare elixirs to restore whatever things Night might throw at her.

Night continued to agilely keep her distance from her, at the same time the rain of arrows never ceased.

Even though a broadsword was a very powerful weapon against monsters the opponent was a human and bows had an inherent speed advantage.

But I had to give credit to Sena who managed to singlehandedly reach level 5. After she became familiar with Yozora's guerrilla tactics she rushed toward Night to deliver her critical hit.

"Roll on the ground painfully and die an ugly death!"

"I will beat the shit out of you, you stupid weasel!"

In terms of equipment and skills Sena had the advantage, in terms of laying traps however, Yozora excelled.

Yozora, who concentrated on exploiting weaknesses, Sena, who favored a frontal assault.

Without backing off those two began their incredible battle against one another. But why would someone play MonKari game like this? I didn't understand.

As for me, I ignored those two retards and went around the map to collect ores and herbs (even if the mission failed, I still got to keep them.)

… Ooh lucky. I found a Dragon Ore.

As the school period came to an end so did the silly war.

The score was 36 to 31 with Yozora being the supposed victor; she had pretty much exhausted all the valuable items she got as a level 3 hunter. If she continued to fight, it would be Sena's turn to dominate.

"Fu, as I thought, games don't work."

"Gosh, I wasted so much time."

Both of them complained as they turned off their PSP's.

"And why do handheld consoles these days have network play anyway. Why do I need to play with other people?"

Yozora had just protested the existence of all multiplayer games .

Sena nodded in agreement.

"Fu, yeah. Why should I cater to other people's thoughts even when I'm in a virtual world?"

"Right. Games should be something that let a person play in whatever way she wants."

They started to express their self-centered ideas.

"…When did you ever try to cooperate with other people?"

[TL note: Both people responded]"What?"

"…Never mind."

They stared at each other, and I tiredly nodded.

And just like that, the tiresome Neighbors Club gaming training session was over.

The following are rubbish conversations.

Due to the actions of Yozora and Sena the club gaming session had a regretful ending. But MonKari was still a very popular and fun game. After I went home I continued to play it.

I was one item short of synthesizing an armour, but no matter how many enemies I fought, I just couldn't get that item.

In the end I gave up and went to sleep. On the following lunch break however,

I noticed that two of my male classmates were playing their PSP's at the corner of the classroom.

As I listened in on their conversation, I realized they were playing MonKari as well.

They were probably trading their loot. ‘I want this item, do you have it? How about I trade you this valuable item for that item?’ I had a feeling I could use that as a conversation starter.

I remembered what Yozora said before. I strengthened my determination, took out my PSP from my bag, and walked towards them.

When they noticed that I was coming for them they started to look frightened.

Damn it, but I couldn’t back down… if I could just tell them that I wanted to join their network game, then they would calm down!

I tried my best to look as harmless as possible and carefully said ’

“Hey, I play MonKari as well. Could any of you trade me the item ‘ド’ [TL note: head of some dragon]?”

As they listened to what I had to say they both had very strained smiles on their faces. “O-Of course.” “Wou-would you like anything else? You can have anything you want!”

“Ah, but I don’t have any good items to trade with you guys.”

“Me-meat is fine! Or Healing Potions!’’ I-If not then herbs are fine!’

"…Really? Thanks."

Relieved, I accepted their offers.

Thanks to them I finally made a set of powerful equipment.

…And soon after, the rumor "Kodaka Hasegawa blackmails other students in the classroom in broad daylight" began to circulate around school.

Why…

Welcome to the World of Galgames

One day as Yozora and I entered the club room together we saw a 20 inch flat screen TV and a Playstation in the corner of the room.

Sena had already arrived before us.

"What's that?"

I asked casually, Sena looked at me as if I was an idiot.

"Your level of ignorance goes really well with your identity as a thug. They are products of modern-day technology called a ' television' and 'Playstation'. You need electricity to run them. Oh, do you know what electricity is?"

"Do I look like a caveman?! What I want to ask is what they are doing here in the club room?"

"What a stupid question. So that we can play video games, duh. "

"Don't bring your stuff into my club room."

Yozora chipped in unhappily. Holding Sena's teapot she poured some coffee into her cup and started sipping. (By the way, Sena brought the teapot to make tea but Yozora took it without asking to make coffee.)

"Why should we play video games here?"

The tragic memory of playing MonKari together was still raw in my mind.

Sena straightened her well-endowed chest and answered,

"I am not talking about that crappy game. I brought them because I found a good game that can truly assist us with our club activities. Be grateful you worthless bunch!"

She called that game crappy…

MonKari was very fun. Even after that incident I still played it … alone.

"Shut up, Meat. You're making the coffee taste bad."

Yozora sipped her coffee and said coolly. She picked up a paperback book she had left on the coffee table and started reading it.

"Wait! I went through the trouble to bring them to school, so listen to what I have to say!"

Sena protested tearfully. Yozora hissed and looked up.

"I went to the trouble of preparing everything for the ignorant, stupid, and bigoted weasel and the completely useless low-class thug- hey pay attention!"

Sena again yelled at Yozora, who had lowered her head to read her book.

'Completely useless low-class thug'- did she mean me?

"The game I prepared is this!"

Sena proudly took out a game package from inside her backpack.

The cover of the box was populated by a very anime-looking girl.

"……'Tokimeite memoriideisu 7'?" [TL comment: Tokimeki Memorial There are only 1-4. The only AVG series (ie. Not Rance) that I can think of that gets to 7 is Memories Off]

Yozora took the package from Sena's hand and read out its title.

And then she turned it over and passively read out the game summary.

"…The hugely popular bishoujo love simulation series Toki Memo's newest release is here exclamation mark exclamation mark . Together you and seven bishoujo will live a rose colored intimate school life exclamation mark exclamation mark exclamation mark."

"You don't need to read out the exclamation mark!"

In any case I corrected Yozora.

Well, I could tell what sort of game this was.

Although I had never played it in person, this was genre of game that dealt with interacting with girls and winning their hearts… It must be a so called 'Galgame'.

"I ran across it when I went to a gaming store."

Sena explained.

"Compared to Mon Kari, this type of game is more in line with the goal of this club, right?"

"…That's true. This could potentially help us with talking to other people."

With a serious expression, Yozora agreed.

"It's written here that it is a simulation game, so it could work... but isn't this game designed for males? I think there are similar games for females, where instead of having bishoujo, you have bishonen as your target."

I believe they are called Otomegames. [TL note: otome sort of means female]

Lexically speaking, it should mean the same as Galgame; but the word 'otome' was talking about the player. As in a love simulation game for girls.

"Ha?"

Sena turned and looked at me. She looked astounded.

"Why do I have to learn how to get along with guys?"

"….Here we go again."

As mentioned before, among male students she was very popular.

"Well, this kind of game won't have much of an effect on a god-like figure like me. But to garbage like Weasel and Kodaka, this should be a good way to practice how to socialize with other people."

"And like always you talk shit. You probably spent god knows how long playing this game in your house, huh? That's why, Meat. .. okay whatever. I am breaking it."

Sena hurriedly snatched the case away as Yozora began to bend it with her hands.

"I-I haven't played this yet! See; the original packaging is still intact!"

Just as Sena said, the wrapping of the case was still there.

Yozora snorted unhappily.

"Fu, then hurry up and open it, you useless piece of meat. Don't just stand around like a dumbass when I don't tell you what to do."

"Guuu…"

Sena, with a stiff face, opened the game packaging, took out the disc, put it into the PS2, and turned on the power.

"Is it all right to not read the manual?" I asked.

"We'll figure it out as we go along. This isn't an action game; there won't be any complex controls."

On the TV the maker's logo appeared. As the smooth melody faded in the opening clip started to play, at least that's what I thought.

"Out of my way."

Sena pressed Start and skipped the introduction movie.

In the title screen she chose New Game and arrived at a name input screen.

So the player of this game got to decide the main character's name.

"Let's see…Ka, Ka, Kashi…wazaki…"

"Hey Meat. I think you just entered your own name without asking me."

As Sena entered her name without a second thought Yozora interrupted.

"Obviously out of all three of us only I am good enough to be the main character."

Sena instantly replied.

"No. It should be my name, as the representative of this club."

"When did you become the representative of this club, you stupid weasel."

"…Since the main character is male shouldn't it be my name?"

"No"

Both of them yelled at my murmur. It's not like I didn't foresee that…

"…In any case, since Sena brought the game, I think it's better if you let her decide on the name, okay?"

After Yozora heard my suggestion she grudgingly said,

"...So be it. Since I am so benevolent I will let you."

"Fu, you can actually be pretty reasonable, Kodaka."

Sena entered the syllable ‘Se’. As the cursor moved towards ‘Na ’-

"I changed my mind."

Yozora suddenly reached over and grabbed Sena's controller. She randomly moved the cursor around, selected a few characters, and pressed Start.

"What are you doing you idiot!"

Sena angrily shouted, but after the name had been confirmed the game started.

In the message block, the main character's monologue appeared .

My name is Semoponume Kashiwazaki. It pains me a bit to say this, but I am a very common high school kid.

"Who is Semoponume!"

"The name of the main character, recently bestowed by the god. "

"What the hell!"

To Sena, who was enraged, Yozora calmly answered.

"That's a good name. If you have a chance why don't you change your name to Semoponume as well? It's a bit of a mouthful to say 'Sena' every time."

"Just exactly how is it a mouthful?! There are only 2 syllables! Semoponume is much more convoluted!"

"I feel disgusted whenever I mention the word 'Sena'. And whenever the word comes up in my mind I get nauseous."

"This is the first time someone insulted my name!"

"It's too much work to restart the game. Just go with this name, Semoponume."

"My name is Sena! Semoponume is the main character's name!"

Yozora smiled slightly.

"Good, so you acknowledge that his name is Semoponume as well. Continue on then."

"Ah?! …Damn it…"

Sena muttered, dismayed and disgruntled, and bitterly started the game.

The main character Semoponume started to introduce his current environment.

He just entered high school. As a normal kid without any noticeable traits, Semoponume Kashiwazaki was about to embark on a fulfilling school life.

"… I think the name Semoponume is a very striking trait by itself." I pointed out.

"That's a name that guarantees teasing. It's already passed the DQN level [TL note: [1]. Semoponume Kashiwazaki's parents must have really hated their kid. How sad." Yozora mocked.

"You-you were the person who named him that……!"

The real Kashiwazaki family's kid, Sena, tearfully continued the game.

After the admission ceremony ended Semoponume walked towards his classroom.

Inside, a laid-back, tea colored hair boy greeted him.

Hey Semoponume.

"Hey", Semoponume answered back, not saying anything further. That was all?

According to the manual, this male classmate had been Semoponume's best friend since junior high school.

"This is stupid… he has friends already…?!"

I was startled.

He didn't need to go out and make friends in the first place, and now he wants to have the luxury of living a fulfilling school life? This kid…

"He doesn't know how good he has it already! I bet he is the kind of person who would say 'Let them eat cake'…!"

I started to hate the main character.

"Kodaka's face looks a bit frightening, or should I say, disgusting."

Yozora coldly said.

The best friend's name was Masaru Suzuki.

That guy wanted to live a fulfilling school life as well, so he pushed the idea that he 'must get a cute girlfriend' onto our main character.

Masaru says [TL note: think 'Confucius says:'] “being friendly with maidens shall lead to fun time in shopping, field trips, and festivals.”

"He says some good things for a dumbass. The friends he seeks match my requirements exactly. I made the right choice in picking this game."

Sena nodded in satisfaction.

Masaru continued to say that this school had many cute girls, and if the main character wanted to know more about a specific girl he can ask him. Finally, he suggested the main character should familiarize himself with fashion trends and lingoes.

"…Why does Masaru offer so much assistance to Semoponume? Did the main character discover his secret weakness and blackmail him?"

Yozora asked in surprise.

"Isn't that what friendship is all about? Friendship is you doing something and not asking for anything in return. Masaru is such a

great person… can't the main character concentrate on fostering his friendship with Masaru?"

"Anything is fine for that dumbass."

Sena continued with the game.

A girl started to chat with the main character in a friendly fashion.

The girl, whose seat was beside the main character's, was Akari Fujibayashi. She had long and slender hair; she looked like a very earnest person.

Although I am a bit nervous about entering a new school, thankfully my neighbor is a nice person. Let's get along, Kashiwazaki-kun.

She said, smiling. This time 'Kashiwazaki-kun' didn't immediately answer as he usually did.

And then a choice menu appeared on the screen. It appeared that you had to decide how to reply to her.

Depending on the choice, her impression on the main character would change as well. The game did feel like a simulator.

There were three choices available:

1. 1: [Nice to meet you too, Akari-chan!]
2. 2: [Aah, nice to meet you, Fujibayashi-san.]
3. 3: […What a frivolous woman. Begone.]

"3 then." "Go with 3."

Sena and Yozora immediately asserted.

"Why 3?! Isn't that the least likely choice?!"

I was surprised.

"Ha? It's only the first day of school, and that woman is already acting all friendly towards a complete stranger. You can't trust someone like that."

"Yeah. That woman must have said the same thing to all the males in the class."

Sena and Yozora said together.

"No no no, she looks like a very sincere girl."

Yozora snorted with a 'fuun' and began to laugh.

"That's what a real bitch looks like! Come to think of it, there are people like that in our classes as well. Those women may look all pure and innocent on the outside, but inside, every one of them wants to swallow men whole." [TL comment: I am not, in any way, exaggerating- the author really did use the word 'bitch' (ビ) here.]

"What's with the way you say it, like it's gossip or something! Does that kind of person really exist?"

"I don't know, but they must. There are tons of websites these days that say all the modern-day JK [TL note: =Japanese high school girls] are dumbass bitches."

…Weren't you a modern-day high school girl as well?

"Then let's go with 3."

Sena said and chose 3.

Fujibayashi-san dolefully said,

I-I am sorry Kashiwazaki-kun… I might have been too casual towards someone I just met… I will be more careful next time. Don't be angry.

With a very pitiful expression she slowly walked away.

"You think you can be forgiven just because you say you will be more careful next time? Don't be angry? What you are doing right now is apologizing without reviewing your own actions. You don't have any idea about what you've done wrong."

"Fuun, you might look decent, but for a bitch it's useless! Go fool around with that dumbass boy over there, you idiot!"

Yozora and Sena continued on cursing at the now gone-from-screen Fujibayashi-san. They are the lowest.

I sighed and took a look at the game manual.

Under the character introduction section the first character listed was Fujibayashi san. She was described as 'Disliking arguments, kind-hearted, and friendly towards everyone.'

I am sorry Fujibayashi-san… Semoponume is such a jerk. Having him sitting next to you is your misfortune, so just ignore him…

After the conversation with Fujibayashi finished, the main character returned to his home.

Besides the main character's status window a few icons appeared.

According to the manual, the player had to pick a particular field to work on for the following week. The choices were 'study', ' sport', 'part-time job', and 'fashion'.

If you chose to study, for example, then Semoponume's intelligence would increase. If you chose sport, then his athletic ability would improve. As his status improved, he would be able to meet other females.

"…If he doesn't have any outstanding traits he won't get to meet better girls. This is the cruelness of reality. This is indeed a simulation game. It's just like the real thing."

Yozora remarked sentimentally. Sena added,

"As opposed to that good-for-nothing dumbass Fujibayashi who talked to people for no apparent reasons, I wonder how she gets men to like her. This will take some serious consideration."

All those insults just because she talked to the classmate sitting beside her.

"Fujibayashi was only trying to be nice. Even the manual says so …"

Sena mockingly said,

"You can't trust those superficial character descriptions. They might be 'official' character settings, but it's debatable whether you can even believe those body size measurements, let alone the actual description."

"What can the game-maker gain by lying in the manual?!"

"Ah, my gosh. This retarded boy here actually blindly believes in those so-called official body size measurements."

…Why am I getting looked down on like this…?

Semoponume's initial statuses were very low. As Yozora and Sena both shared the belief 'I hate stupid people', we decided to concentrate our effort on raising the intelligence attribute.

After we selected the icon with a pencil and a notebook, an animation clip appeared showing the main character sitting beside

a table and grinding through his school books. As a result the intelligence bar increased in length. It was only the first day of the school and he was already working so diligently; what a good kid he was, that Semoponume.

"…His intelligence increases only when he studies, how useless initially was this kid anyway."

Yozora coolly commented. Now that she pointed it out, I did feel the same.

After a month of day and night non-stop studying Semoponume's intelligence finally rose from the initial score of 20 to 100.

"…He was rubbish at the beginning yet it only took him a month to raise his marks 5-fold. I think that's pretty amazing, no?"

"If we record and summarize his way of studying and put them into a book it might become a best seller." Yozora added.

And then, the screen suddenly changed.

Judging from the background we were at the library.

Semoponume got a bit tired from reading his books, and wanted to read something else for a change, so he left his seat.

Semoponume seemed to find a very interesting book. As he reached out his hand for it another girl tried to take the book at the same time.

With two pigtails and a pair of glasses, this docile girl looked very cute.

She was also one of the main character's romance candidates. I could conclude that because in the game manual her character description had the phrase 'possible to get' written in it.

Ah, sorry."

The glasses-wearing girl quickly withdrew her hand.

And an option box appeared:

1. 1: ["Ah, sorry" and let her have the book.]
1. 2: ["I got this book first!" and take the book regardless.]

I thought these two people would choose 2 without hesitation; I was surprised when both Yozora and Sena chose 1.

"If you have time to read books then get back to your studies!"

"You still have some practice exams. You must raise your intelligence to 200 and now is not the time to relax you piece of trash. Anything other than top marks is unacceptable."

…These two would probably become the overly education-focused type mothers.

Semoponume let the girl have the book. The girl was a bit frightened but at the same time a cheerful smile appeared on her face. She quickly expressed her gratitude to him. It seemed that she had always wanted to read this book, but due to its popularity she hadn't been able to borrow it. If that was the case why didn't she just buy one herself? I thought to myself.

Eh, if you can, could you tell me your name?

Yeah. I am Semoponume Kashiwazaki from class D.

Semoponume Kashiwazaki-san… that's a nice name.

"…What a tragic sensibility… this…"

"It's because you made up the weird name Semoponume that this appears awkward! It would have been fine if we had used Sena instead…"

Sena stared at Yozora and complained.

The girl's name was Yukiko Nagata. Afterwards they talked a bit more about reading and her recommended books, and then the screen returned back to the main character's house.

The notification 'Option to ask Yukiko Nagata out for a date is now available' appeared on the screen. And then the option 'Ask Masaru about what Yukiko Nagata likes to do and where she likes to go' popped up as well.

"Hmm, in any case let's try to befriend her first okay?"

Sena said.

…This was not a game about making friends; it was a game about getting a girlfriend.

"So much better than that bitch Fujibayashi. Okay, let's do it."

Yozora agreed as well. Anyway our first target was the ' literature girl' (the game manual's words) Yukiko Nagata.

From asking Masaru, we knew that Yukiko Nagata was what she appeared to be. Her hobby was reading, she liked to go to the library and places including the aquarium, museum and planetarium. In other words, she liked quiet places.

"If Masaru knows so much about her why doesn't he try to go for Nagata? He seems like a shallow person in the first place."

"Masaru might appear shallow but he is a real man who sees friendship more important than chicks! I want a friend like him…"

Yozora looked at me with a disturbed look, said ‘disgusting’, and left me alone.

Anyway, as per Masaru's suggestion, Semoponume invited Yukiko Nagata to the library during the weekend.

The date in the library went very smoothly. So did the one in the aquarium, and the one in museum following that. The dates just kept on coming.

"Ha, this is so great. Playing and shopping with your fellow female classmates."

Sena enjoyed herself with the game.

…But Semoponume, by setting, was a guy.

That aside, it appeared that Semoponume and Yukiko Nagata were getting along very well. Whenever Yukiko spoke her face would have a reddish happiness blush.

"Hahahaha~~~~~~~*heart* This girl is so cute, so very cute... It feels so great to have a girl admiring you!"

Looks like Sena really liked Yukiko Nagata. She seemed so happy.

Yozora, on the other hand, still looked annoyed. "…Fu, well, guess she is an all right kid."

I thought we would continue down Yukiko Nagata's route smoothly.

But one day, when Semoponume invited Yukiko Nagata to go home together, she ran off angrily.

"What…?!"

"Wait, wh-why?! What happened, Nagata?!"

Yozora and Sena both had an expression of bewilderment on their faces.

The screen switched to the main character's room.

And then Masaru gave Semoponume a call.

According to him, the rumor 'Semoponume hurt Fujibayashi' was circulating between the girl students.

"So that's the reason why Yukiko Nagata became cold towards the main character."

"Ha? Kodaka, what's going on?"

"Having a girl dislike you will create negative rumors. This creates a chain reaction and makes other girls have bad impressions of you as well. This is what the manual says."

When we were going full throttle down Yukiko Nagata's route, from time to time Fujibayashi would try to talk to the main character.

And whenever that happened Sena and Yozora would, just like the first time they met her, choose the coldest options like 'Go away' or 'There is nothing to talk about between us.' It didn't take a genius to figure out that wouldn't make them friends.

"…In other words the reason why Nagata hates me is because Fujibayashi is talking about me behind my back. That damn bitch …!"

Sena hatefully murmured.

"No, I don't think that's what's happening here…"

"Unforgivable… absolutely unforgivable… coward… I am going kill you next time we meet…"

She was not listening at all.

"…By the way, the manual says that 'if your impression is bad then apologize quickly and reconcile your relationship.'"

"Ha?! Why do I need to apologize to that damn woman?! And reconcile? I don't recall ever being on good terms with that pig in the first place!"

"No, but if you don't do anything and let your reputation stay this low…"

"I haven't done anything wrong, who told her to talk to me without my consent, and then she has the guts to complain about being hurt. Why should I bow down and apologize to that stupid woman."

Yozora agitatedly replied.

"We share the same opinion. There is no way I will apologize. Nagata must know this is all a big misunderstanding as well. I believe in Nagata."

Sena steadfastly proclaimed. She continued her game without apologizing to Fujibayashi.

…Having faith in her was not going to do anything.

As the rumors become more ferocious, finally one day, Yukiko Nagata refused to answer my phone calls.

And then, unexpectedly, even Masaru said *Because I hang around with you, the girls hate me now…* and left me as well.

A years' worth of time ended, and the screen changed to pitch black.

From then on my life was grey.

I stopped socializing with my friends, and no matter how hard I tried, my school and sports marks were bad.

I immediately started to work after I graduated. With my feeble wages, I live my days drowned in booze. I never got a good friend, nor did I ever get married. Alone, I lived to my bitter end.

If I could restart my life, I'd wish to go through a fulfilling school life next time…

…Just like this, Semoponume's monologue slowly appeared on the screen. Accompanied with the melodramatic BGM the words ' GAME OVER' appeared.

"…"

We silently stared at the screen.

"……hi-kku"

I heard a soft sob.

"Gu-suu… Yukiko… I trusted you…"

Sena, with one hand holding the controller, started to cry.

Are you kidding me… how much emotion did she put into this game…

"…Akari Fujibayashi… I am going to kill you…"

Yozora, as if enveloped by a dark resentful aura, slowly stood up. She shakily put on her shoes and walked out of the club room. She seemed to be going somewhere.

Meanwhile, Sena's disjointed sobbing echoed inside the room. I felt very uncomfortable, so I got up and went outside as well. Then I returned home.

Then, on the following day-

"Here, take it."

I had just entered the club room and Sena, inside already, shoved something towards me.

I took a look at it and realized it was 'Tokimeite Memoriddeizu 7'.

"I am lending this to you. Go home and play through it."

As I stood still, Sena told me.

"It's such a fantastic thing. It would be a tragedy in life to not play this game at least once. Especially the 3rd year events in Akari Fujibayashi's route, they were so touching."

As I stared at Sena, who seemed completely different yesterday, I became more confused.

"…Didn't you call Akari Fujibayashi a 'pig' or something yesterday?"

"Don't say bad things about Akari!"

She was angry. I wasn't the person who called her names.

"Got that? Akari's parents passed away when she was only a little kid. Throughout her life she has always been alone, but she works hard with what she has! And she never ever hated this world, instead she would always smile to those around her and cheer for them!"

"She is completely opposite from you two then."

"Aah?"

"…Nothing."

I was too scared so I took my words back.

"And Yukiko is very nice as well. Her real identity is actually… ah, this is a spoiler. You need to play through Yukiko's route as well! Got it? But then again, Aina and Miho and Natsumi and Mizuki and Karen are all very good people as well! So you have to get all their good ends, okay?"

A very happy expression appeared on Sena's face.

After she got Game Over yesterday she played through the game again alone. And, in one night, she went through all the girls ' routes. When I looked at her closely I could even see her black eyes.

"…Well, I'll try it out when I feel like it."

I paused and answered.

"No. 'When I feel like it' is not good enough; it's 'I must play this game'. This is your duty. 'Tokimeki' is a game that every citizen in this country should play! This is not only a game… if I have to describe it… it is life…"

As Sena said all these tragic things with an all-too-serious face, the most I could do was not have my face burst into uncontrolled laughter.

On that day, after I returned home.

As per Sena's request I started playing 'Tokimemo' unenthusiastically. During events such as cultural festival and graduation trips, whenever I have to choose who I would spend my time with, I would always choose Masaru. Without making contacts with any female students I reached the graduation ceremony. At the end of it, Masaru appeared. In good humor, he smiled sourly and said *Although we lived through our tragic high school life without ever getting ourselves some girls I'm pretty glad to have you as my buddy. Well, I guess I will continue to trouble you after we graduate.*

This was a Bad End, but I felt very content.

Underling

"Lately I feel like someone is secretly staring at me…"

One day after school in the club room, I murmured with a troubled expression.

"Fuuu…"

Yozora, as if she was looking at an ongoing tragedy, stared at me pityingly and sighed lightly.

"Haa"

Moreover, Sena started laughing as if she was making fun of a fool.

"Damn it…"

Although I had foreseen their reactions I still regretted telling them.

"It's true!"

"Really? It's true then."

Yozora stopped looking sympathetic and lightly accepted.

"…That's all it took for you to believe me?"

"Yeah, I believe you. I believe the fact that 'Kodaka feels like someone is staring at him.'"

So you don't believe me at all…

"…It doesn't matter if I'm in the washroom, or eating, or just walking down a hallway; I can always feel a peculiar stare from somewhere."

"Could it be people looking at you due to your presence?"

I refuted Sena's guess.

"No. I'm used to people staring at me because of my reputation so I'm very certain that's not it. If it was the usual staring, usually when I looked in that direction, the person who was staring would always run away."

"That's a pretty sad life."

"Shut up!"

I sincerely hoped she would stop saying that or else even I would start pitying myself.

"So basically, what sort of gaze was it?" Yozora interrupted.

"…Basically… umm… how do I describe it, it was like someone was observing me. It felt pretty weird. Whenever I looked in the direction the gaze was coming from it would disappear. But whenever I shifted my eyes away that funny sensation would come back."

"You're just tired, Kodaka."

"Don't imitate 'X-Files' 's heroine's tone!"

"Maybe they are paranormal activities."

"What?!"

"I don't know, it's just a guess. Maybe it's the ghost of a gangster boss who died twenty years ago, pissed off that out of the blue a weird delinquent overtook his prized throne."

"Fuun, how could that be possible."

Yozora countered Sena.

"Just as Yozora said, why would there be a ghost-"

"Up to 15 years ago this school was girls only. Thus the delinquent boss from twenty years ago would not be 'his' prized position; it would be 'her' prized position."

"That's true now that you mention it."

"No! Who cares whether it's a guy boss or girl boss! Ghosts and stuff are not believable!"

I retorted mightily. Sena, looking annoyed, turned to me and said,

"Then what do you think it was? Are you saying that a fetishist was observing you from a dark corner somewhere?"

"Hmm…"

I couldn't think of a possible answer.

"…On second thought, maybe it's other delinquents that are responsible for this. Do you two know anything related to this?"

Either way it was not the work of ghosts. Using the words ' other delinquents' was just a matter of convenience, not implying that I am a delinquent myself.

"Err… In our school hot-headed kids that say things like 'this new transfer kid is a pain, let's teach him a lesson' are non-existent . The kids here are like adults; domesticated cattle used to being choke fed."

"You actually made that sort of analogy about your fellow school mates…?"

I supposed I should scold her for that.

"What about Yozora? Do you have any clue?"

"Moron. Why would I, the epitome of anti-social behavior, know the current rumors in school?"

I almost got the sense that Yozora was rather proud of that.

"If it's not the work of other delinquents… maybe it's the Prefects?"

"This school doesn't have Prefects, there is no reason for their existence."

"…I see. Then… it must be that, right?"

"What?"

Sena appeared to be very surprised.

I hesitated slightly, and said,

"…It's a… you know… a stalker…"

"……"

"……"

Upon hearing what I said Yozora and Sena were silent for a few seconds, and then-

"Ahahahahahahahahahahahaha!
Byahahahhaahahahahahahahahah!
Kuhahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

Sena burst into an uncontrolled fit of laughter.

"Ahyahyahya, are you retarded?! Kodaka, were you serious when you said that?! Ahyahyaha! Ah, why would anyone want to stalk you, a low class vulgar delinquent like you?! And Kodaka, do you know that 90% of stalking's have romantic complications as the motive?? Do you have any romantic complications?! Since you transferred to this school, have you had any, any sort of romantic

experience? Name a scene from any romance novel that has happened to you in the past. I bet there is none, right dumbasssssssss!"

"Guh…"

Under Sena's ferocious ridiculing my face started to get hot.

Suddenly I looked toward Yozora.

This kid will, without a doubt, mock me intensely as well. But what I got instead was-

"……"

Yozora quietly stood up. She poured a cup of coffee and put it in front of me. And on her face a questionably earnest and gentle smile appeared…!?

I had no idea what she wanted to say, nor could I think of anything to say.

"Here, drink it while it's still warm, Kodaka…"

"St-stop doing that… don't be so kind to me all of a sudden…"

Sincere or not, Yozora's gentleness was enough to make me think "Yozora, you look so beautiful." However if I did say that I would break down and start crying. Compared to Sena's direct verbal attack, Yozora's mental attack was a few times more hurtful .

"Fuu, when you're looking at someone more pitiful than you, you start feeling pretty good about yourself. That saying really is true."

"Sympathy can hurt more than outright malice, you know that well don't you!"

"Yes, of course. I have it engraved in my heart."

"That's even more despicable!"

This woman really knew how to deal the maximum damage to one's esteem…

"Aah, whatever. I was a bit rash in concluding that it's a stalker! Enough with the teasing!"

I tried to steer the topic away.

"While it is unlikely, it could be true! How should I put it… It's not that shocking that I could experience some romantic episodes!"

"…In other words, the girl who secretly likes Kodaka, is hiding in a dark corner observing your every move?"

In terms of staring, what Yozora was doing to me was the perfect example of staring at someone.

"…I don't think the person was doing it from a dark corner. Well, it's possible, I mean it's not entirely impossible… or rather I hope it's true…"

My self-confidence steadily leaked away. Like a dog lowering its tail, I lowered my voice.

"Don't you feel ashamed of actually saying out loud your wishful thinking?"

"Wishful thinking…?!"

I was very offended by Sena's verbal abuse.

"…Forget it. I was stupid in asking you two for help."

Disappointed, I stood up and tried to leave the room.

"Wait Kodaka."

Yozora said.

"I won't ignore my distressed fellow club member. Let me help you catch that stalker!"

"That's okay, I'm not that bothered. Also, it might not even be a stalker."

"Don't worry about it. It's not like I have much else to do in my free time."

So my trouble was good for wasting her free time huh.

Although she was in her creepily nice 'beautiful Yozora' mode, I didn't feel offended.

"…Fuun, if Yozora is helping then I will help as well. Even though I don't have much free time."

Sena, following Yozora's lead, quickly offered her assistance as well.

…I felt like something troublesome was going to happen again. Once again I regretted mentioning the 'strange gaze' incident to them.

The next morning.

As usual I arrived at school half an hour early. Yozora and Sena were already waiting for me at the entrance.

"You're late. Are you going to do this or not Kodaka?!"

"How dare you make me wait."

Perhaps due to the time being early morning their attitudes were even worse than usual.

"…No that gaze usually starts after class begins. I don't think there was any point in coming to school early."

"What…?!"

My remark angered both of them.

"You should have told me sooner!"

"You made me waste an hour of my life…! With that woman!"

"That's my line Meat. I silently stood with that piece of smelly raw meat for an hour. That was very irritating."

So they got here an hour ago, and stood here without saying anything to each other.

We didn't say we would meet up in the first place.

"…Well, in any case, sorry…"

They were not completely satisfied by this, but all I could do was apologize.

After homeroom ended the classroom started to get noisy.

Sena came to my class and said,

"Let's go."

"Yeah yeah."

"Don't order me around Meat."

Yozora and I followed Sena out of the classroom.

We didn't have any particular place we wanted to go; we just wandered around before class started.

"…Hmm… I do feel like I am being stared at."

"Yeah… looks like it's more than just Kodaka's paranoia."

Sena soberly nodded.

"…I hate to intrude into your serious conversation,"

I nervously said.

"…it's true that we are being intensely stared at, but this is not what I was talking about…"

"?"

Yozora and Sena looked very surprised. They had not yet realized what was going on.

"We've been completely surrounded by other students! We can't find the origin of the gaze with all these people here!"

"Ah…"

Yozora at my right; Sena at my left.

One is a delinquent (even though really I'm not), the second one is a long brilliantly black hair cute girl, and finally the third one is a blond hair blue eye queen-like cute girl.

Alone any one of us would garner much attention; now with all three of us together, in addition to the peculiar stare that I mentioned, many students were staring at us as well.

With so many stares being directed at us it was impossible to separate the person we wanted from the rest.

…Furthermore the stares were not the usual observation variety ; I could sense some serious jealousy and despise coming from those intense stares.

"Gosh. If that's true then what was the point of me announcing to the boys in my class 'I have an important matter to take care of today; I don't have time to waste with you critters.'"

"So that's the reason!"

…When I listened closely I heard wails like '…uugh… Sena-sama [TL note: a really dignified way of calling someone]has abandoned us…' and 'He has two hot chicks with him…'

"No, I am only…!"

I hurriedly turned to those students to explain, but they all quickly lowered their heads and ran away.

"Ahah so that's what that is. The technique thugs always use on bystanders; 'What the hell are you looking at?!' This is my first time seeing it in person."

Yozora nonchalantly commented.

…And on that day the rumor 'Kodaka Hasegawa forcefully took the hands of two cute chicks and dragged them around the school' spread throughout the school.

"That bastard… even though I'm not sure of his existence, if he does exist I am going to catch him…"

The time was after school.

Right now I am strolling inside the school while secretly paying attention to my surroundings (alone of course).

I could feel it, that weird gaze among the curious glances by other students.

It's not that the gaze itself could do any harm to me. I could always just let it be. But thanks to that fellow, I got another bad rumor tied to my name.

I couldn't help but be annoyed by it.

…But at the same time I felt like there wasn't much sense in blaming him.

I can clearly feel that stare even now.

Mixed in with curious glances, the stare that is calmly observing me.

Let's walk towards a deserted place.

I climbed up the stairs to a semi-deserted floor mostly used for storage.

Those curious glances gradually disappeared, what's left is the one I seek.

I off-handedly took a look behind my back and finally I could see a person standing in a dark corner.

I acted like I hadn't noticed; I sped up my steps in the deserted hallway.

When I got to the end of the hallway I followed the corner and hid myself in a blind spot.

After a few seconds,

Don

"Hya"

Someone ran into me. He gave a weak groan and landed backward onto the floor.

So this was the culprit who had been following me, probably.

I took a look at the person's face…

"……"

I was stunned at what I saw.

This person was very cute.

A face that had the combination of both innocence and childishness.

Unlike Yozora and Sena's rather edgy faces, the face in front of me was the perfect demonstration of what a bishoujo should look like.

But the clothing beneath the face felt out of place.

…This bishoujo, why was she wearing the guy's uniform?

"…???"

Countless questions started appearing in my mind. At the same time, she(?) stood up.

She(?) was expressionless yet I could sense that she(?) was slightly surprised.

"Is this it?"

"…?"

"Is this the so-called extortion?"

"No!"

For some reason she(?) said this with a slightly cheerful tone; I loudly denied it.

"My name is Yukimura Kusunoki. I am a first year from class one."

Following that incident, I led the female(?) stalker to the Neighbors Club's room. With a soft voice she(?) introduced herself .

And then she(?) took out a wallet from her(?) bag and, to my astonishment, ceremoniously put it into my hands.

"?"

"I only have 3000 Yen. Please forgive me."

"No! I mean what are you doing?!"

Who does this kid think I am.

"…Yukimura Kusunoki… the name sounds like a certain general from the Warring States period."

Sena said.

Sena and Yozora were also in the room. They took a look at the girl(?) and said cruel jokes like “You forced your underclassmen to wear the guy's uniform… Kodaka your special fetishes just blow me away…” and “Who’s that, your new wallet?”

“That is correct.”

The girl(?) who called herself Yukimura nodded at Sena.

“It is my parents wish that I should grow up to be a true Japanese man like Sanada Yukimura. Thus they gave me this name .”

“…Japanese… man?”

Yozora frowned.

“…Erm. Forgive me for asking but… are you male?”

I carefully asked. Yukimura passively tilted his head and replied,

“As you can see I am male.”

“…No that is not what I see.”

“?”

With his head tilted and his face in polite puzzlement, Yukimura started to ponder its meaning. That expression was too cute.

…Well there were guys in this world who look like girls. If he himself said he was a guy, then it was probably true… it was just a bit unbelievable, that's all.

"…Gender question aside… Yukimura? Why were you stalking me?"

As I enquired, Yozora and Sena also looked at Yukimura.

Yukimura, with his unchanging poker face, passively answered,

"Simply put I am a victim of bullying."

"…Bullying…"

I repeated Yukimura's word and felt melancholic.

Even in this peaceful, down-to-earth Christian private school, where even the most thuggish looking kids (like me) were honest, the act of bullying existed.

"This school has it too huh, that kind of thing…"

"Obviously. There is no school that doesn't have bullying."

Yozora composedly asserted.

…Although I wasn't absolutely sure, I too shared Yozora's opinion.

I transferred quite a few times and have seen various bullies in each school.

"Why would bullying happen?"

"Because it is fun."

Yozora replied matter of factly.

"…Fun?"

"You will know when you do it, most humans… like to attack those who can't fight back. It's like a primal instinct. Wantonly killing bugs, or posting slanderous comments on anonymous BBS, or trolling on people's blogs. And if the target misspoke something , or did some actions that are against the social norm, you can even claim justice is on your side and bully the target with pleasure."

"…You know a lot about this."

I answered with a twitch in my face. Yozora ferociously glared at me.

"Don't lump me in with those people."

She answered chillingly.

It looked like I had made her very angry.

"So-so why did you follow Kodaka?"

Perhaps Sena had noticed the stern mood as well; she quickly asked Yukimura.

"Oh yeah, you said that you stalked me because you were ' bullied'. But I can't comprehend the cause and effect that would make you stalk me."

Yukimura replied,

"I want to become as strong and cool as Kodaka-senpai. All I want is to learn how to be a manly man like him."

"Strong and cool…!?"

An incredulous expression appeared on Sena's face.

"…You mean this vulgar delinquent?"

Yukimura nodded rather shyly (his expression was very adorable.)

"Like a breeze, you are a lone wolf that nothing can make you pause in your steps. You are a model Japanese man."

"A lone wolf… that's because he has no friends."

"Shut up."

I replied irritatedly.

"Oblivious to social norm you only follow your own way of living. To satisfy your immense lust you pillage all those within your grasp. Any defiance would be brutally suppressed and succumbed to under your throne. Immersed in your affluent wealth and surrounded by your ample maiden harem, your being has already transcended beyond mere mortal righteousness or evil. Even the immortal deities are fearful of you. You have reached the pinnacle in all dimensions."

"Wait a second?! What's with the Romance of the Three Kingdoms' tyrant Dong Zhuo's description?! I've always followed the school rules down to the letter. I've never blackmailed, leered at girls, or committed violent acts on other students!"

In one breath I refuted Yukimura's chorus-like compliments (?).

Yukimura gently laughed.

"You are just being modest."

"I am not being modesssssstttt!!"

"As the result of looking at your daily life in the last few days my conclusion is that, true to the rumor, Kodaka-senpai is a true man."

"There should be a limit on how blind you can get!"

As I looked back at Yukimura's admiring stare I broke into a cold sweat.

And then Yozora said,

"…In other words, Yukimura you want to become a strong man so that you don't get bullied?"

"That's right. As a male I would want to be a great man like Kodaka senpai. How do I become as magnificent as senpai?"

"I-I'm not really that magnificent…!"

His praise left me with goosebumps all over my skin.

"Please teach me. How do I become like you?"

At that moment Sena freely asked,

"Even if you ask… so how exactly were you being bullied? If things got out of hand you shouldn't force yourself to handle them ; telling the teacher might be a better choice."

"Yes. In short, I was being isolated by the rest of my male schoolmates."

Yukimura passively said.

"Being isolated?"

"Yes. For instance, before PE classes, as I was about to change into my gym clothing everyone around me would shrink away."

"……"

…What? That didn't sound right…

"Or when we played together, when I was sweating a lot and wanted to take off my shirt, everyone would disappear."

…

"And also when we were playing dodgeball no one would ever throw the ball at me."

…

"It was the same in junior high. During Karate no one wanted to be my opponent."

…

"If other people say they are going somewhere and I ask to go with them they refuse. When I enter a washroom the people inside would often scramble out of it."

…Erm that wasn't bullying. They acted like that because you look too much like a girl and they didn't know how to behave and act in front of you.

Even for me, if I see Yukimura walk into a male washroom, I would be very embarrassed as well, even if I know he is male.

"Hey, that's not bully-oww!"

Without warning Yozora smacked the back of my head.

"I see. That's so sad. I sympathize with you so much I am about to cry."

Yozora said this without a hint of sympathy on her face.

"Yes. A few days ago I finally summoned up the courage and, in the washroom, asked a fellow student why they were socially isolating me. He got all red in the face and proclaimed that it was because I look like a girl. That is so mean."

I think the blushing stemmed from embarrassment, not anger…

"I am being treated this way because I look like a girl. In other words, if I become a manly man, then I will no longer be bullied."

"As I said that's not bull-"

Yozora smacked me again.

"…What are you doing Yozora?"

"Be quiet for a second Kodaka."

Yozora whispered to me. She then turned to Yukimura,

"Yukimura Kusunoki. One must compliment you for not bowing down under a formidable obstacle. You shall stay by Kodaka's side and practice the way of manhood."

"Hey?!"

"Thank you so much. I shall learn with all my being."

"Very good. Oh Yukimura, since Kodaka is a member of my Neighbors Club, he is often very busy. If you join this club you will be able to better observe Kodaka."

"Is that so. Then let me join as well."

"Good. Then sign your name here on this club joining form."

"Yes. A signature."

- rustle rustle*

Yukimura Kusunoki took the form from Yozora's hand and, with elegant calligraphy, he wrote his name on it.

What was this for…

"…What are you trying to pull Yozora. This is the same as lying …"

I whispered.

"What a paranoid thing to say. Yukimura is our comrade who shares our problem; namely personal relationship troubles. The fact that we would be able to support him here is great for all of us. "

"…And what you are really thinking?"

"It would be a damn shame to let this interesting fool get away. First thing we should do is tie him to the club."

"…"

"I was just thinking that the Neighbors Club needs an errand boy. Well, if you don't want him we can just throw him away."

"You really are the worst!"

"Isn't this great? Now you get an underling. You finally look like a real delinquent."

"What's so great about it?!"

"An underling?"

Yukimura picked up on this word and reacted.

"I am an underling of Kodaka-senpai?"

"No Yukimura. It's a joke. Ignore it."

"So happy."

A very grateful smile appeared on Yukimura's face as he replied.

"…Ha?"

"It is an honor to be an underling to a magnificent man like Kodaka-senpai. Please let me serve you. I would do anything for Kodaka-senpai."

"No, you know?"

"Yes?"

"Argh…"

Yukimura, with his big shimmering eyes, stared at me longingly . In my entire life I had never seen another person stare at me like that. I couldn't say anything.

"…Well, then, do your best…"

"Yes. Kodaka-senpai?"

"Ah?"

"Could I call you Aniki?" [TL note: 'Big bro', usually used by Yakuza or delinquents.]

"…Do whatever you want."

I weakly nodded and Yukimura smiled cutely.

His quest to become a strong and cool Japanese man had a long way to go.

My achievement for today:

I got an underling.

…It seemed that, judging from today's events, my wish for a smooth and orderly school life also had a long way to go.

During lunch break.

Whenever classes ended and I went to the cafeteria to buy my lunch the classroom would become rowdy.

These days I often get this feeling…

"Aniki."

Yukimura entered the classroom.

Even though he was entering an upperclassman's classroom he showed no signs of fear. He walked straight to my seat.

Wow, he's got guts…

"Aniki. Here."

Yukimura came up to me and put the stuff in his arms onto my desk.

"…?"

Curry bread, fried noodle bread, chocolate, and comic books.

The cover of the comic book had a drawing of a vicious looking man with a French bread-like funny hair style and a long sleeved uniform.

“I will be going then, Aniki.”

“Wa-wait Yukimura! What are these?”

I hurriedly called back Yukimura who was about to leave.

“They are Aniki’s lunch and a 'delinquent comic’. Boss Yozora has taught me that it is an underling’s duty to buy lunch and comics for his Aniki.”

Yukimura answered in a strangely happy way.

“That person only knows how to say useless stuff…”

I looked around the classroom but couldn’t see Yozora.

“Perhaps my service is unsatisfactory?”

Yukimura lowered his head and uneasily looked up at me.

I, of course, wouldn’t do anything that might harm this very pure underclassman.

“That, that’s not true. You came at just the right time, I was getting hungry. This… let’s see… isn’t this ‘Tales of the Strongest

Delinquent'? I've wanted to read it… it's true… I am happy… even stupid… ah, no, it's a great book that doesn't require much thinking…"

Bread wasn't better than a rice ball, and I didn't really like chocolate milk. And of course I had absolutely no interest in delinquent comics.

"I am glad."

As I looked at Yukimura's cute face, mine started to blush.

I needed to calm down. He was a guy…!

"…Ah right. I should pay you back. How much are these?"

Yukimura shook his head,

"I can't possibly take money from Aniki. Aniki's compliments are the best rewards."

"No no, even if you say it's fine!"

"I shall take my leave now."

After replying very politely, Yukimura quickly walked out of the classroom.

It can't be helped… I will secretly put the money inside his bag later on.

The lunch itself was fine… but the delinquent comic's price was hurting a bit…

…On that day the rumor "Kodaka Hasegawa made a cute underclassman his errand boy" spread throughout the school.

That's a fact, but that's not the truth…

Hasegawa Family Affairs

When I returned home from school my sister was relaxing in the living room.

It was 7 o'clock; I was back a bit later than usual.

"I'm back Kobato."

Kobato Hasegawa, thirteen years old, a 2nd year junior high school student.

My little sister.

She attended the St. Chronica School's junior high division. Due to the distance between the junior and the senior high divisions, we almost never left school together.

As opposed to my appearance, where other than my hair color I look very much Japanese, she looked a lot more like our mother. White skin, brilliantly blond hair, blue eyes; her face was that of a westerner.

Even though it might sound a bit something for me to describe my little sister like this but… to be honest, I think she is a very cute girl.

Yes, a cute girl huh…

"…Ku ku ku… back finally… my other half…"

Kobato chuckled and said.

Then she stood up on her chair.

"I have waited too long for this… make haste… present your sacrifices to me……"

As she spoke out her acting-like melodramatic lines, she slowly raised her hands.

Her clothing was what they called gothic loli? I think that's what it's called. The edge of her dress was lined with pure black lace. This made washing them a chore; I really wished she would stop wearing them.

In her hands, with its entire body covered in stitches, was her rather freaky stuffed rabbit.

Her right eye was red; that's because she was wearing her color contact lens.

Regretfully, she was my little sister…

"I'm sorry for coming back late. You hungry, Kobato?"

After I asked, Kobato unhappily replied,

"Fu… Kobato is nothing but a false name… mine name doth be Leysis Vi Felicity Sumeragi …Shinso [TL note: go watch Tsukihime] of the mighty Blood Clan of the Night."

…Very regretful indeed, my little sister is.

And of course her name was not Leysis Vi Felicity Sumeragi; it was Kobato Hasegawa.

"I desire only for fresh blood… ku ku ku. Great plague will descend upon thee if thou dost not make haste with the sacrifices …"

Just be honest and say you are hungry, sheesh.

"Just hold on a moment, okay? I will prepare tonight's meal right away."

I divided the food that I bought from the supermarket after school. Those that I wouldn't need tonight I put into the fridge.

I was pretty lucky today. I made it in time for the half price scallop sales. Let's make some seafood and pasta.

First, with lettuce, cucumber, tomato, and ham, I made a simple salad.

Then I put water into a pot and turned on the gas.

As I waited for the water to boil I stripped the scallops from their shells, diced the squid, onion, and spinach, and chopped the hot pepper and garlic into tiny pieces.

The clams were half price as well, I originally planned to cook them, but after some consideration decided against it; it would take too long to prepare them. I will save them for the weekend.

I put a flat frying pan onto another stove. I first fried the hot pepper and garlic with vegetable oil, and then I added the seafood into the pan.

With the pasta cooking in the pot I fried the seafood bundle in the frying pan. When they were somewhat cooked I threw in some vegetables.

After I added in salt, pepper, and sauces to the pan I picked up the cooked pasta from the pot and put that in as well.

In 15 minutes I had cooked tonight's dinner.

I put the food and the salad onto dishes and carried them to the table.

"Here."

"Ku ku ku… you have my gratitude…"

As I cooked, Kobato poured some tomato juice into her wine glass.

"Let's eat then."

"Ku ku ku… the blood of virgins is ever so tasteful…"

"That's only tomato juice!"

I scolded her as I chewed on some pasta.

The only girl in my family, how should I say this… as you can see, is very strange.

Back in elementary school, she was only a normal girl who liked to snap disposable chopsticks with her bottom and ignite her farts (that wasn't very normal already.) But, at the beginning of junior high, ever since she watched a fantasy anime called "Full Metal Necromancer", she started engaging in this strange talk and fashion.

I wasn't sure, but I think there were magicians and vampires in that show. Due to the influence of that show she was now playing her 'self-designed super cool character.'

Well, she would get bored of it eventually so I let her be.

"The food will get cold if you don't eat faster."

As Kobato took her time and ate her pasta strand by strand, I reminded her.

"…Ku ku ku… a mere mortal such as you dared to speak back to me; that is rather courageous of you. What? Have you forgotten that you are only a summoned creature of my glorious blood race? Troubling, indeed…"

"So that is the setting!"

It looked like Kobato hadn't settled on the setting yet. My character was shifting between 'fragment of a soul', 'lover from past life', and 'lowly servant born from a dark stew'. Anything was fine with me, really.

"Ah, eat the onions as well."

"…"

As Kobato picked out the onions in her dish and put them aside , I gently reminded her. She stabbed her fork into them forcefully and put them into her mouth.

Yep. A good kid should be able to eat food that she hates.

When she first started playing her Reisosu character, she was particularly hysterical. Every meal she would leave most of her food intact. Finally, during dinner about a year ago, she yelled "Ku kuu. My, my magic power is going berserk!" and flipped her soup dish. Our father, angered by this, shouted "Don't waste food!" and spanked her good. Since then she has been able to finish all her food, albeit she does so with a very detested face.

"By the way Kobato, I guess your magic power doesn't go berserk anymore?"

"A, An-chan!"

[TL note: it equals onii-chan, btw]

Immediately after my absent minded comment Kobato became flushed in the face and yelled.

After a bit, however, she suddenly switched back to her usual expression.

"…That, I do not know what you are talking about. Perhaps in ancient times, when I was young…"

"In ancient times… how old are you again?"

"I am Leysis Vi Felicity Sumeragi … a Blood Clan of the Night born 10 thousand years ago…"

"10 thousand years ago… so that was back in the Joumon era! What an impressive vampire."

"Fu fu fu… my Blood Clan of the Night, back when you day dwellers were subsisting off the jungle, already had a magnificent advanced magic civilization…"

"That's amazing. I'm done."

I had finished my pasta and salad.

But I feel that I hadn't had enough yet.

I guess I would cook up something later tonight.

"…Ah yes, my other half. Why are my sacrifices of poor quality these days?"

So Kobato didn't feel full either.

"It's because I have club activities; I can't come home early and cook."

Because I had less time to cook, I often cooked food that didn't take long to prepare. There had been a marked decrease in quantity as well.

Today's meal was already plentiful in comparison; when I was tired I would just make fried pasta or curry rice.

I wanted to put more effort into cooking as well. Also lately I had been experimenting with new recipes.

"Servant, which is more important, club activities or I…"

Kobato asked unhappily.

Of course club activities… I was about to answer her, but then it occurred to me that the club was not that important in the first place.

"Club activities."

Anyway, let's go with this answer.

"Mu…"

Kobato cutely puffed up her cheeks.

I laughed in resignation and replied,

"Then how about you make dinner for yourself?"

"…Ku ku ku… what a silly joke. You expect me to do the chores of lowly women?"

"Apologize to all the men and women in this country who cook every day!"

After I ended my talk with Kobato I washed the eating utensils and went back to my room.

I finished my homework then cleaned the bathroom and prepared the bath water.

"Kobato, let's stop for now and take a shower."

I said to Kobato, who was sitting in the living room watching an anime DVD. In one of her hands was her now empty wine glass.

"Ku ku ku… yes. Say, the storage room has become devoid of fresh blood."

"Ah, now that you mention it, I forgot to buy tomato juice. Drink the coke in the beer fridge for now."

"What, is it Pepsi?"

Kobato asked without any of her figures of speech this time.

"No. It's Coca Cola."

"…I am in the Pepsi faction!"

"Cola was 30 Yen cheaper in the supermarket."

"…Fu, so be it… although I would choose tomato juice if we had it…"

As Kobato took her bath I washed some clothing. After that, my work for today was done.

What an unchanging daily life.

Currently only Kobato and I lived in this neither big nor small house.

When I was born, our father worked very diligently to save up enough money to buy this house. For the past ten years, due to his work, we moved very frequently. During that period Kobato and I had never returned to this house (father, on the other hand, came back every now and then to clean things up.)

When father decided to work in the US, Kobato and I said we didn't want to move to another country. In the end he let us siblings stay in Japan.

For this reason, we finally had the chance to move back to this town.

It had been 10 years since I left, but perhaps due to the sheer number of times we had moved, I didn't have much of a remaining impression of this place. When I moved back here a month ago I didn't feel nostalgic at all.

The junior and senior high school that we transferred to, its chairman is father's best friend (also Sena's father).

Since then we had been living peacefully like this.

Even back when all three of us lived together, I was responsible for all the house chores. So to me this wasn't that much different (in fact, since the kitchen here was larger and I needed to cook for one less person, the house work had technically become easier).

If I had to comment, however, the fact that the first time in my high school life I had joined a club meant that I now often returned home late. That could be problematic.

I should stop here and explain. Soon after our mother gave birth to Kobato, she was in an accident and passed away.

She also was a very good friend to the school chairman. Back when she was a student of the female only St. Chronica School it

was through the chairman that she came to know our father (I heard that they met in a ball held in St. Korunika).

Well, most outsiders would sympathize and say 'that's terrible!' But to me, who had lived like this for the past 10 years, I was used to it; I didn't think this was all that bad.

Now whenever someone says that to me I would subconsciously become angry and defend my family vigorously. Because of that, other people tend to keep their distance from us. This put me in a difficult spot.

As I rolled around on my bed thinking about this stuff…

"Fueeeeeen, An-chaaaaaaaaan!"

Kobato, nude, ran into my room in tears.

"Ko-Kobato?! What's wrong?!"

Kobato sobbed and said,

"The, the bath, the bath water is cold!"

"Eh, really?"

I rushed to the bathroom on the first floor with Kobato.

I put my hand in the tub, and sure enough, the should-be warm water was completely cold.

Then I turned on the shower head, but no water came out.

I ran to the kitchen and turned on the gas stove but it did turn on here.

"In other words, it's a boiler problem. I'll get a repairman now …"

"…I almost had my bath in cold water, this might well be a scheme by a conspirator who knows the weaknesses of the Blood Clan of the Night…ku ku ku. Normal vampires aside, it shall take more than this to defeat a Shinso such as me!"

Kobato, back to her Reisosu characterization (but still nude), chuckled and said.

By the way, vampires were weak against cold water.

"If the water is warm, you would probably make up some settings that say warm water is very comfortable for vampires. In

any case, wipe your body dry and put on some clothing, Kobato, or else you might catch a cold."

"Ku ku ku… a Shinso such as me can never catch a cold… ah-chu"

I sighed, moved to the washstand and handed her a towel.

I worry a lot about my little sister…

After I hung up, although it was past normal business hours, it didn't take long for the heater repairman to come to my house. As I suspected, the boiler had broke down.

Thankfully, it was fixed and hot water started coming out again. It was an ancient model from 17 years ago. Due to its age, it might be wise to exchange it for a new one.

… I would have to contact dad for the money.

Having only two people living together was more troublesome than I imagined…

To the Tainted Sadness

When Yozora and I came to the club room after school one day we found Sena was already inside.

"Yo."

I made a conscious effort to greet her but there was no response.

With one of her hands clenching a computer mouse on the desk, Sena directed all her attention to the laptop in front of her.

As she was wearing a pair of headphones we couldn't hear what the computer was playing.

"How dare that Meat ignore me!"

Yozora agitatedly said.

"… It was me who greeted her. Furthermore she is not ignoring us; she just didn't hear us…"

I tried to correct her, and as always Yozora ignored it. She quietly sneaked toward Sena. I guess her disdain for Sena had propelled her to engage in some sort of devious scheme again.

Ba-chi.

She suddenly yanked the headphone plug out of its jack.

"Wha?!"

Sena turned around and finally noticed us; a look of incredulous surprise appeared on her face. At the same time the computer started playing this sort of noise.

*Noooooooooooooo! If you start moving this intensely my xxx will tear uuu, ah, ah, ah, this feels gooood! Lucas' huge c*ck is amazzzzzzzing! It's ramming straight into my pussy, oh my god! Oh my god oh my god oh my god! I am feeling strange! Ah, something's coming, ah, ya, aha, I am cumming, I am cumming, cumming, I am cummmmmmmminnnnnng~~ ~~~~~~!!"*

"Ahwawa!"

Panicking, Sena rushed to turn off the sound volume.

"What are you doing you idiot!"

Sena, blushing furiously on her face and tears in her eyes, protested.

"That, that's my line!"

Yozora too, with such redness rarely seen on her face, yelled back.

"In, in the holy club room, you actually had the gall to commit this kind of shameless act…!"

I secretly took a look at the computer screen.

…On the screen was an anime style drawing with a… a nude girl and a nude guy. They, they were having… let's just say they were combining together.

"Sena… you…"

"Hey, don't look!"

Sena quickly slammed her laptop shut.

"Don't, don't misunderstand?! This is 'The Sacred Blackstar'. It's about to be animated so it's the hottest galgame these days. It's about the epic fantasy chronicle and romance the blacksmith Lucas and his companion went through! This particular scene happened after they overcame all those hardships and finally defeated the final god of destruction Valniball, afterwards the main character Lucas and Cecilia affirm their love for one another in a very touching way; this is not the kind of perverse scene you two have in mind!"

…The way Sena tried to rationalize her actions, how should I say this… it was actually kind of cute.

"…No matter what you say, the fact that you were playing an eroge in the club room…"

Sena, upon hearing my off-note reply, started blushing again.

"I, I didn't know! …I didn't know that… this game would have these kind of scenes. After I completed 'Tokimeki Memorial' I went and bought five other games of the same genre, but they

were just not as good as 'Tokimeki Memorial'. So I went on 'Yafoo! Answers' and posted the request "Looking for recommendation on a game like 'Tokimeki Memorial' where you can make friends with girls." A couple people responded saying that this is the hottest game these days…"

"That might well be true, but doesn't the cover of the box, in plain sight, say that this game is eighteen plus?!"

"Yes it says 'Adults Only' on the box, but I thought it meant that the game is so high quality that only adults can enjoy it…"

"What kind of new age interpretation is that?! Didn't anyone ask for your age when you bought the game?"

"All I did was ask the boys in my class if they had a copy of ' The Sacred Blackstar', and to give it to me if they did. It didn't take long before I got one. Of course I didn't just take the game; as a reward I let him be my foot rest during lunch break. And then I have been playing this game through the night. As I couldn't finish the game, I brought it to school with me."

"And then we coincidentally intruded on you playing the game, and it just so happened that that kind of scene was going on…"

"Exactly!"

Sena confirmed unhappily.

But for Yozora, she did not take Sena's explanation into consideration at all.

"You pervert."

With a large amount of contempt and disdain in her tone, she ridiculed Sena.

"Damn it! Did, did you not hear what I just said?!"

As if someone had stabbed Sena in the heart, her face twitched from the humiliation. Yozora took no pity on her and continued her assault.

"Shut up you slut. Nymphomaniac. Streaker. Bitch. Tramp. Natural-born whore. Smutty kept woman. Walking obscenity. Adulterous kaleidoscope. Anyone who comes in contact with you will become pregnant."

"All I did was play this game, why do I have to be put down like that you idiot!"

Sena interrupted.

"I-I mean yes this game does contain some explicit material! But those are only small parts of the game! The theme of this game is so deep that, without a strong literary foundation, you will not be able to grasp the true essence of the story! This is art! Although you have never played this game, you deride it solely based on

your prejudiced impression! It's like seeing Botticelli's 'La nascita di Venere' or Goya's 'Naked Maja' and claim that they are just vulgar paintings; that is such a retarded thing to say!"

Yozora sneered and responded,

"So what. Even if the game itself is indeed art, you, who was lasciviously staring at those smutty scenes, has absolutely no ground nor credibility to stand on. I am not deriding the game; I am only calling a person known as meat a pervert! A pervert like you is trying to commandeer the artistry of a work to mask the raw truth that you were playing eroge in the club room. This by itself is a sacrilege to both this work and art!"

"Kuuu…"

Tears started rolling down Sena's face.

…As always, Yozora delivered her exceedingly nasty insults with ease. And then, to the person known as Meat, she said,

"So just admit it. Admit that you are a pervert. Admit that you don't really care about the artistry and deepness of the work; you are just a slut who was sexually excited by the erotic content. Confess!"

Yozora denounced Sena with glee.

"No, no…! All I want to do is to become good friends with Cecilia…! The relationship between Cecilia and me is nothing but pure! We don't share any of those vulgar emotions! Even in this scene!"

Sena opened her laptop again. A partially mosaic but mostly nude drawing appeared in front of Yozora.

Yozora immediately started to blush.

"I am not a pervert! You understand? Even in the presence of this drawing I don't think this is lecherous! I know that one must view a work of art as art; You are the pervert! All you know how to do is to look at this beautiful scene and call it perverse! The fact that you are unable to understand the sensibility of art is a tragedy ! It is people like you who will grow up to become Agnen Chaso or Satoyo Damimikuchiouko [TL note: I rofl on this part. They are the 'Jack Thompson' of the anime world. The 2nd name is so long because it is the kanji decomposition of野 J], and says unreasonable things like we should enforce thought control in modern society or burn all the books!"

…No. Claiming that the sex scene from an erotic game is not erotic at all; that is unreasonable.

"O-Okay Meat, read the lines in this scene out loud then!"

Yozora suggested while avoiding looking at the screen directly.

"What…?!"

Yozora, who realized that she had discovered Sena's weak point , smirked at her and said,

"If this story is indeed merely art and not perverse, then you shouldn't be embarrassed at all reading it out loud, because this is just a work of art, right? Oh, or are you saying this game is just some cheap smut and doesn't have any redeeming artistic value?"

"That, that's not true!"

Sena denied Yozora's accusation.

"Fine. Then read it out."

"Al-Although this work is not smut it's still embarrassing reading aloud embarrassing stuff! And that's not because the content itself is embarrassing; it's because I feel embarrassed reading aloud in front of other people!"

"…Is that so, then I will read out loud as well."

"Ha?"

Sena, upon hearing Yozora's unanticipated compromise, was astounded.

"I said I will read aloud as well, so that you will read aloud for me. I am doing this because I don't want you to be the only one who is reading. If I read aloud as well, you won't feel embarrassed then. This is just the same as all the students sequentially reading out loud paragraphs in literature classes."

"That, that's… it does make sense."

…Really?

"I am already making a grave compromise here; if you still want to run away after this, your action would only prove that this game is not real art, you are nothing but a slab of adulterous meat, and the main female character in this game is probably a cheap whore anyone can give a shot with 10 thousand yen."

"I will not let anyone insult Cecilia like that! No matter what happened to Cecilia, she always carries through with what she believes in. I respect her a lot! So I will live like her and not run away! If this is all you can say, then I shall read it out loud then! You better not get cold feet over this!"

Ahhh, she fell for the provocation.

"Good! Then you will read that scene from the game out loud. As for me… I will pick one of Chuya Nakahara's poems in the literature textbook. Ahh so embarrassing so embarrassing. I'm about to give a reading on a poem."

"Hah?! Wa-wait a second!"

Sena hurriedly stopped Yozora.

"What's the problem here? I will give a reading on a piece artwork in a literature textbook, you Meat, will give a reading on

those artistic passages from that game of yours. The terms are virtually the same. I mean, we both are going to read out loud our respective piece of artworks, right?"

"…! ~~~~~~~~~!"

Sena finally realized that she had fallen into Yozora's trap. Her lips started to tremble. With tears in her eyes she stared at Yozora.

"Fi-fine! I will read out loud! Those artistic passages in 'The Sacred Blackstar'! Don't be moved to tears by them!"

Resigned to her fate, Sena despairingly turned to her computer. She rewound back to the start of the erotic scene.

"I-I will start reading now…"

"…Go."

Yozora, looking slight nervous, nodded.

"…Lu… Lucas… hurry… to my, my drenched Valniball…"

"Louder!"

"Guh… to, to my drenched Valniball! With your stiff and thick and shiny black sacred sword, thrust it in…!"

Sena shakily read out the words on the screen one by one.

"You are already so moist with fingering alone. You really are… a la-lascivious so-sow…. huh"

Those were the main character, Lucas' lines.

What kind of sexual harassing creature was he!

"Don't… say those mean things Lucas…" "Fu, that's one lusty face you got there, you sl… slutty pig! See, if you want it, put some sincerity into your begging!'… Uuuu…"

…The 'uuuu' was not from the original passage, by the way.

"…Pl-Please… ma-master. With, with your… sacred sword, to my mushy mushy place here, thrust it in… please.'' "Fufufu, this is not called sacred sword. Call it by its real name. So what do you want to thrust into where? Huh?'… Uuu… hikku…!"

Seshiriya… I mean, Sena was reading all this in tears.

"Fufu… hurry up, say it. What does Cecilia want to thrust into which part?"

Yozora said.

Her cheeks were flaming red; her eyes were full of a sense of avarice.

…Lucas probably had that expression on his face as well.

"~…Lu-Lucas' co, co, co… coc, coc… into, my, my drenched… pu… pu, pu… pus…HOW CAN I SAY THIS OUT LOUD YOU IDIOT

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH----------!!”

Unable to hold back anymore, Cecilia, no I mean Sena finally went berserk. Like a rabbit she dashed out of the club room door.

And then she turned toward to Yozora, who was standing in front of the open window, and yelled,

“YOZORA IS A RETARDED DUMBASS I HOPE YOU DIE----------!!”

Like a grade school kid, she cursed, cried and ran away.

Yozora and I silently turned from the door to the open window.

“…Hey, don’t you think you went a bit overboard this time?”

“…I am reflecting on my actions already.”

After she heard my question, for once she frankly admitted it.

“…You know, when Meat was reading that out loud, I was actually recording it. I should upload this rare piece of work to NicoNico. The title for it should be ‘High School Girl Played Eroge and Moaned at the Same Time.’”

“Are you the devil himself?!”

“Just kidding.”

Then we both shifted the focus of our eyes to faraway.

To the tainted sadness, today, too, the snow rests on.

To the tainted sadness, today, too, the wind blows away."

And Yozora, just like she promised, lightly read out Chuya Nakahara's poem.

Tales of Momotarou [2]

When I arrived at the club room, I found a maid standing inside .

“Whoa?!”

I was taken by surprise; without thinking I blankly greeted her.

“You have worked hard at school, Aniki.”

…He was our new club member, Yukimura Kusunoki.

He was wearing a folded pinafore and a short skirt.

I couldn’t help but secretly take a glance at the white thighs underneath the skirt. Calm down Kodaka Hasegawa! He is a dude …!

….But seriously, what perfect attire for him…

“Uwah gross. He just stared at him…”

From inside the club room, Sena looked at me and said.

Yozora was sitting on the sofa across from Sena.

“…Why is Yukimura dressed up as a maid?”

I finally remembered the question.

"This is part of the training to become a manly man."

Yozora replied a matter of factly.

"Dressing up as a maid is training?!"

Yukimura replied.

"Yozora-anego said that as a manly man, no matter what clothing he wears, his manliness cannot be masked. The day I am wearing this girly clothing but my manliness swells up and radiates out from my soul will be the day I become a real man. Even though this is a difficult trial, I will do my best!"

"You are pulling your tricks again...!"

"You think this is a trick? I am not making things up."

Yozora rebuffed.

"For a real man, even if he is dressed as a maid, his aura of manliness would still diffuse out… Yukimura, imagine Kodaka wearing the maid dress."

"Don't think of such a strange image!!!!!"

Although I forcefully scolded them Yukimura still closed his eyes and started imagining.

"Buhaha, gross, that's gross!"

Sena, who also imagined the sight of me in a maid dress, burst into laughter.

"Aniki wearing a maid dress."

……

……

Bo

…Why is Yukimura blushing?

He opened his eyes.

"Indeed, even if Aniki wears a maid dress, he still looks like a delinquent."

"Why would there be any maid-dress-wearing delinquents in this world?! Also as I said before, I am not a delinquent! How many time do I have to tell you?!"

Yozora ignored my objection.

"Yukimura, you finally understand the difficulty of this trial. You must strive to reach that level."

"Yes. I will work hard with Aniki as my goal."

"You don't have to work hard in the first place…"

I tiredly said and casually sat down on the sofa.

And then, Yukimura poured a cup of coffee for me.

Without thinking about it, I subconsciously felt very content.

"…Having a maid in the club room is pretty nice, huh?"

Yozora, as if she had read my mind, whispered to me.

"Well, it doesn't have to be Yukimura… no, never mind."

If one had to choose between Yozora, Sena, and Yukimura to be a maid, no matter your assumption, Yukimura was still the best choice.

"Speaking of which, who brought the maid dress here?"

"It's mine."

"Yozora's…? Don't tell me you like to cosplay?"

"No. I bought it on 'Yafoo! Action' just in case I need it."

"What kind of 'just in case' did you have in mind…"

"Anyway, let's put a stop to this talk about maid dresses."

Yozora changed the topic.

"I suddenly remembered how Meat read out a snippet of an eroge a while back."

"*Busu*?!"

Sena snorted out the coffee she was sipping.

"I-I beg you, forget about it please!"

Ignoring Sena's tearfully sincere request, Yozora continued.

"This ability is very important for making friends; the ability to act!"

…I could tell she was about to say something very terrible again .

"Eh, act?"

"Yes. If you are good at acting you will be able to happily chat with someone you secretly despise. It would look as if you two were getting along very well. In case you need to ask him for a favor later on, being on good terms would make this easier."

Very terrible, indeed.

The first person to object to Yozora's baloney, surprisingly, was Yukimura.

"But Anego, one of the core values of being a real man is to be true to oneself no matter what happens. Acting for the sake of hiding yourself is not something a real man should do."

"Still young, Yukimura."

"Please enlighten me."

"Have you not heard of this saying before? 'To learn something one must first learn its actions.'"

"…Is there really such a saying?"

But Yukimura looked as if he had very much been enlightened by what Yozora said.

"I see. Although I am still not mature, as I imitate the acts of real men, one day I too will become a real man. You are amazing, Anego. I understand fully now."

He was so easy to convince.

Then what about Sena-

"…Acting… now that's a good idea."

"Why are you agreeing with her?"

I didn't expect Sena, who acted as if the whole world revolved around her, to be interested in acting for the sake of others.

"When you are acting in a role, you might be able to discover hidden potential in yourself. From that you can become an even more amazing person. This is what Mitduki once said."

"Mitduki?"

"Mitduki is obviously referring to Tokimeki 7's Mitduki. The president of the drama club."

"A game character!"

I stared at her and said.

"…But, when you think about it, if you are so good at acting that you can control your expression and actions with ease then you might be able to decrease the number of misunderstandings…"

…Then?

It looked like we had aligned our interests in the same direction.

"It's decided. The club activity for today will be to practice acting!"

Yozora lively announced.

"To practice acting… I guess we should do a play then?"

"Of course."

"The script?"

"I have it prepared. My idea is that it's best to start with something everyone is familiar with. So I brought this."

Yozora took a few play-scripts from her bag and passed them to everyone.

"Fu, Yozora is pretty quick."

Sena, in a rare act, appeared impressed.

I looked at the title of the script… 'Momotarou'.

"…Even though it's true that everyone is familiar with this story..."

"But at our age won't you feel embarrassed acting out ' Momotarou'?"

Sena and I said, disgruntled; Yozora calmly looked at us and said,

"You two are in no position to refuse. If you think you are, I'm going to broadcast that."

"That?"

"The Sacred Blackstar."

"I-I love Momotarou! It's unexpectedly deep, so much that even an adult can enjoy the fabulous tales of Momotarou!"

Sena forcefully smiled and said.

Yukimura, too, was nodding his head.

"Good choice, Sena-anego. The mainstream theory these days theorized that the tales of Momotarou took shape in ancient Japan, when the Yamato Dynasty and Kibi no Kuni were at war. Momotarou was likely based on the famous son of Emperor Kourei Tennou; Prince Hiko Isaserihi Kono Mikoto who was active in the war. Although there is no substantial evidence, in the Muromachi period-"

"Stop, Yukimura! I know that you are knowledgeable."

Yozora stopped him from continuing; Yukimura, who was a bit carried away in his speech, looked quite sad.

Is Yukimura a history buff…?

I suddenly had a question.

"Hey, but if we're going to act out Momotarou we are a bit short on people."

The characters in Momotarou are Momotarou himself, the dog, the monkey, the rooster, the old man, the old woman, ogres, and one that is essential to a play; the narrator.

It was clear that the four of us present were not enough.

"Relax. I already considered this shortcoming and made appropriate adjustments."

"Eh… in other words, you wrote the entire script?"

"Yeah. It wasn't easy; I'm proud of this work."

"Well, as long as you didn't deviate from the original story too much, I can accept it…"

"Good. Then let's get started."

Following Yozora's declaration, I opened my play script.

On its first page it listed the characters.

"Characters"

- Momotarou
- Old Lady
- Ogre
- Tree

"So few characters?!"

"This is the result of the limited number of actors we have."

"Then what's up with the 'Tree'?!"

"I took out too many characters, so I sort of added one back."

"The tree is obviously not needed!"

"Well then, let's decide on the roles."

Yozora ignored my complaint and continued.

"For fairness, we should draw to decide."

Yozora took a piece of worksheet and made a few simple tags.

We all took a piece and decided our role.

"Characters"

- Momotarou = Sena Kashiwazaki
- Old Lady = Yukimura Kusunoki
- Ogre = Yozora Mikadzuki
- Tree = Kodaka Hasegawa

"Right from the start I had a bad feeling about this; I ended up as a tree…"

"Fu fu, I am the main character. Well, really, I was the obvious choice. I too feel that Yozora would make a very good ogre. I shall banish you!"

Sena laughed contentedly.

“Fu, you are laughing for now Meat.”

Yozora unhappily replied.

“Then hurry up and get started. I think at this point everyone is already familiar with the story, so there won’t be any need for story introduction.”

We moved the sofa and the table to the corners of the room. In the middle of the room was space for an empty stage area and we started the play.

“Kodaka, since you are the tree, go stand there from start to end .”

Sena ordered me to go stand by the wall.

“…”

I wanted to say something, but I resisted and took a look at my play-script instead.

The first line was Momotarou’s line.

“…How come I have the starting line?”

Sena asked in surprise. Regardless, she followed the directions in the play-script, stood at the center of the stage, and spoke out her lines.

"Let, let's see… once upon a time, there was an old lady who lived alone. One day when she was doing laundry by the river, suddenly from upstream a rice bucket sized peach floated down. The old lady took the peach home, cut it open, and out came me from inside."

"It's first person point of view from Momotarou!"

"It's just like those first person point of view novels where the main character does the narration as well. With this we can decrease the number of actors required by one. What a great idea."

Yozora said somewhat proudly.

"No, wait a second. If you even took out the narrator, then why did you add 'Tree' back… wouldn't it be better to have me as the narrator instead?!"

After she heard my gripe, Yozora clicked her tongue and looked at me.

"…What? That didn't occur to you?"

And then Yozora irritatedly replied,

"…If we let the trees chat so much the worldview is going to collapse. Next."

She didn't take in my words at all.

"Because I was born from inside a peach, I was given the simple name 'Momotarou'. I lived aside the old lady and gradually grew up. Finally, that day arrived."

"Momotarou, there are ogres on the island committing evil deeds. They're terrifying."

Yukimura, playing as the old lady, walked onto the stage. As if he didn't plan on acting at all, he stiffly spoke out his lines.

Although the old lady was in a maid dress…

"Fu, whether it's Yozora or some other stuff, I shall exterminate it!"

Finally it's Momotarou's first line (as opposed to the narrator's). Even though Sena said the line with passion it didn't seem like she wanted to follow the script at all.

"Is that so. Good luck then."

…And that's the end of the old lady's part. She hasn't given Momotarou the rice dango yet…

Yukimura unsteadily walked toward me.

"How was it, Aniki. My lifelike acting."

"……"

I didn't know what to say, so I chose silence.

"Incredible, Aniki! You have already become one with the Tree character. I still have much to learn."

He looked at me respectfully and exited the stage.

Sena again came to the center of the stage and spoke her lines.

"With the old lady's farewell, I left the village and embarked on a journey to the Island of Ogre. During the voyage, I witnessed the sacrifice of a dog, a monkey, and a rooster. But I left those aside and sped up my trek."

"What have you done?!"

"The dog, the monkey, and the rooster are what people think of whenever one mentions 'Momotarou'. I cannot just take away all their references. This is called respecting the source material."

Yozora explained truthfully.

… Having them show up as corpses; what sort of 'respecting the source material' is that?

"Many things happened, and I have finally reached the Island of Ogre. The ogres on the island all charged towards me, but I slaughtered them without trouble. And finally, I made it to the deepest part of the ogre king's castle."

…That was fast…

"At last, I stood in front of the ogre king."

At this moment, Yozora walked onstage.

"So you finally appeared, Yozora! Prepare yourself! If I kill you, all the treasures on this island shall be mine!"

Momotarou, looking absolutely like the antagonist, yelled. Yozora loathly stared back.

And then she started her emotional and lifelike acting,

"Why? How can you commit these cruel and inhumane acts with such leisure? We, banished by the Yamato Dynasty, are the last of our race. Not only have your kind banished us to this forsaken place, but now you even want to claim our lives…! With such cold-bloodedness, you humans are the real ogres!"

That line of the Ogre boss… was so cool!

"Eh… what's this plot development…"

Sena uncertainly continued her role.

"Shut, shut up! Did you not kill those innocent civilians?!"

"Nonsense! They were soldiers your kind sent to pillage the gold our ancestors painstakingly collected! All my people want is to live peacefully!"

"Is that right? No, be quiet! The existence of ogres is a sin itself! I, Momotarou shall wield my sword of justice and strike down you evil ogres! We shall decide who the ally of righteousness is!"

"Spreading such atrocity on this green earth… and claiming itself as an ally of righteousness! Is there no justice in this world? I shall become the devil, and annihilate all living beings! Come, you dog of the dynasty. My name is Kokuten no Mikoto, the last emperor of Kibi no Kuni, the being that will bring destruction to this world!"

"Yozora wait a second! No matter how you look at it, the Ogres are the good guys! Furthermore, the name of the Ogre king is not mentioned anywhere in the script!"

Sena finally exploded with anger; Yozora laughed and said,

"When I was writing the script, I thought it was no fun writing a simple story that rewards the nice and punishes the naughty; I made a few changes as a result. As for the name, I just came up with it."

"That's so cheap. Only you get to yell out those cool lines. I am Momotarou you know?!"

"What's so cheap about it… there is no clear good and bad in this world. History is just a tool of the victors'. In other words, only the victor in this battle can describe itself fighting for justice!"

As Yozora yelled this out, a rolled up atlas somehow appeared in her hands. She whacked at Sena's head.

I looked at my play script. On the last page it said "And so, Momotarou and the ogre began their duel. The side that makes the opponent cries first is the winner, and thus is the good side." That was all the page had.

What happened to practicing acting?

"Ow! Wait, it's not fair that only you have a weapon!"

Looking at the tearfully protesting Sena, Yozora gave her another whack.

"Objection denied! I shall have revenge for my brothers that you massacred!"

BokaBokaBokaBokaBoka!

"Aah, enough!"

Sena rolled up her copy of the play-script and started to fight back. However the loosely stapled play script was no match for the rugged atlas. It fell apart quickly.

"Wait, ow, that hurt! Uuh! Aah! Uuuu… idiot!"

Sena finally escaped offstage.

Yozora leisurely stood at the center of the stage; a vicious smile appeared on her face.

"… Just wait you humans… I have put a bloody end to Momotarou; your world is next! Fufufufufufufu…. buhahahahahahahhaahaha…! The End!"

Yozora reverted back to her usual tone and said,

"So how was this tiresome play…"

I replied,

"It was all right. It's not as if we are acting in front of others."

Yozora calmly said,

"But this is a pretty fun play. We shall make this a Neighbor's Club reoccurring event!"

Yozora alone contently wiped the sweat off her forehead; at the same time an expression of resent appeared on Sena and my faces.

The Delinquent Samurai Returns to His Mother School

[TL Note: Before you read this chapter, note that this chapter can be very offensive as it contains descriptions about rape. There is a very good reason why this chapter is not in the manga. In any case, before you go on, you should read up on what is Cell phone novels. By the way, if you have read Ore no Imouto ga Konna ni Kawaii Wake ga Nai light novel (not the anime), this is the kind of things Kirino writes.]

"I am going to write the script for a play. All of you keep it down."

Yozora entered the club room while saying so and took out a stack of grid players.

I, Yozora, Sena, and Yukimura were gathered in the room.

…Yesterday she declared that acting will be a periodic exercise for the Neighbors Club. She wasn't kidding…

"Yesterday's Momotarou contained certain attributes that made it flawed. I am humble enough to admit this and reflect on my miscalculations."

"Huh…"

"I didn't know you could actually say sensible things like that."

Sena and I were pleasantly surprised.

"Yeah. It's boring to adapt an existing story. So this time the story will be completely original."

"You only reflected on that?!"

I scolded.

"…And by completely original, you mean you would be writing it?"

Sena questioned.

"Fu, don't worry. My perfect story will be the pinnacle of blockbuster entertainment."

Yesterday's Momotarou incident certainly did not inspire confidence.

"So basically, what can we expect from this story of yours?"

"Fu, I was planning to show it to you after it was finished, but I will make an exception this time and share a little bit with you."

The insincerity in her tones made me think she was going to tell us regardless.

"First of all the main character is a high school girl. A blonde Ojou-sama. Someone who is always surrounded by boys who idolize her."

"…"

Sena looked like she wanted to say something, but she listened on.

"One day our main character befriended another girl. They became very close friends."

"Hehe."

Sena seemed a bit happy.

"But the truth is that the main character has stolen the girl's boyfriend and the girl seeks revenge. She first gets close to the main character to lower her guard. Finally one night she called the main character to a park and our foolish main character fell for this . While the main character waited in the park, she was assaulted by the girl's 10+ male friends. They gangbanged her and she became pregnant!"

"Wait a second!!!!"

Sena exclaimed.

"What's with this horrible story! What kind of blockbuster is this?"

"An unlikable woman getting treated harshly; the audience is going to love it. I bet if this story was on screen, the audience would give a standing ovation."

"How bad would the audience have to be in order to applaud that kind of story!"

"Well, you are right that what we currently have is not sufficient. This is only the prologue. And then the main character got a new boyfriend, but then the boyfriend got into a car accident and passed away. And then she finally met a true friend who was not pretentious, but that person too passed away due to illness. And then that bitch from the prologue got some dudes to rape her again. At the end the main character got involved in a crime scene and was killed by a stray bullet. As she pitifully collapsed onto the ground and awaited her inescapable death, all she could think of was how much angst she had towards the events in her life."

"Isn't that even worse?!"

Yozora looked at Sena, who looked absolutely furious, with polite puzzlement.

"…Hmm, then how about this? When the main character is about to die, she thinks 'My life is one of maggots. If I can be reincarnated, I don't want to be a vulgar blonde with big breasts; I want to be a slender black hair girl…' and then she quietly passes away…"

"Why do I have to regret my life and want to reincarnate into someone like you!"

"…Fu, I didn't have any particular person in mind when I designed the character, but now that you mentioned it, you are the most suitable person for the role, Meat. Good job Meat, you are the main character."

"What's so good about that!"

Sena tearfully yelled.

"…Hey, don't tell me my character's going to be…"

"The bitch's friend; the thug who raped the main character."

"That's what I figured!"

I yelled at Yozora's instant reply.

"You have a lot of screen time. Again and again you get to rape Meat… I mean the main character. Kodaka, you will have to play the part of 50 men."

"That's amazing, Aniki. This is an important character. Aniki can even play a tree effortlessly; there is no better choice for this position than Aniki."

Yukimura complimented me in the strangest way.

"This script is rejected. REJECTED!"

Sena declared, with me nodding furiously.

Yozora unhappily replied,

"This kind of plot is very popular with modern day high school girls… backwards people who are out of fashion are so pathetic…"

"Putting the question of whether this is truly popular or not aside, we are not acting in front of other people. We don't have to consider whether this is popular or not."

"…Fu, that makes sense. Frankly I don't want to write about some dumb blonde girl anyway."

"Uguu…"

Sena stared angrily at Yozora.

"In any case, we can't let you write the screenplay by yourself! You need to take our suggestions into consideration as well, you hear me?!"

"Fu… I even have to be considerate of willful actors huh, it's tough being a producer…"

Yozora sighed and said.

It looked to me like she had completely forgotten who she was. She really did think she was the producer.

"Yeah sure I will consider your opinion as well. What kind of story do you guys want?"

Sena immediately answered,

"A story about me becoming very good friends with many girls."

"Why does the premise have to be Meat being the main character, you self-important fool. But friendship as the theme, huh, that's not a bad suggestion… Kodaka and Yukimura?"

"I do think a story of samurai is most suitable."

"Samurai……?"

Yozora looked troubled.

"…As for me… how about fighting against some sort of monster…?"

"So Momotarou then?"

"No. Although Momotarou matches this description, I personally want something a bit modern. Like using ESP to fight, or something. A light novel kind of story."

"Kodaka, you're a delinquent, yet you read novels?"

Sena asked, surprised.

"It takes longer to finish a novel than a manga. Reading light novels slowly is a good way to spend time leisurely."

"In other words a lonely man's essential everyday item."

"Don't put it in such an irritating way. It's rude to the authors and the readers."

Again my complaint met a brick wall. Ah, I forgot to contest about her calling me a delinquent.

"Anego, in addition to samurai, a story about a delinquent should be good as well."

Yukimura expressed his opinion again.

"I do think that it would be splendid to have a delinquent main character as cool as Aniki."

"When you put it that way this does sound nice!"

"Fu… samurai… ESP… and a delinquent."

Yozora, looking serious, jotted some notes down.

"[The Main Character]"

"A delinquent who, like a samurai, wields a katana. He has a Regent hair style. He can use ESP."

"What kind of main character is this?!"

"This is a combination of what you people asked for."

Yozora answered impassively.

"Then where is my suggestion?!"

"Aah, that's right."

Yozora added the following line to her notepad.

"[The Main Character]"

"A delinquent who, like a samurai, wields a katana. He has a Regent hair style. He can use ESP. His name is Meat Zaemon."

"Who is Meat Zaemon?!"

"The name 'Meat' with a bit of Samurai-style twist."

"My name is not Meat it's Sena!"

"Since we have decided on the main character let's move on to the plot."

As expected, Yozora ignored Sena's complaint.

"I read up a bit on story writing before this. It seems that the structure of a story can be divided into a 'dramatic structure', or as

well call it the 'johakyuu'. [3] Like the human skeleton structure this is paramount to the story. If you don't have much action, and only have the characters wasting the time away by chatting needlessly, then the story is bad." [TL: Is this what you guys do all the time?]

"Well it depends on the skill of the author as well. If he is skillful even an uneventful story can become interesting. But generally this is very difficult to pull off. As newcomers we should stay true to the basics."

"That's right. So let's begin with the introduction part."

As Yozora spoke, I started thinking.

"…It's a bit cliché, but how about a plot of a boy saving the girl?"

In any case I shared my thought.

"Kodaka, I thought you wanted to have a story about people fighting against monsters with ESP?"

Sena asked.

"It doesn't have to be that…"

"Then how about saving a woman from a monster's attack? Good. The introduction can look like this."

As Yozora spoke she wrote down the summary for the plot.

[Summary: Introduction]

As the woman was being raped by a monster in school, the main character Meat Zaemon saved her.

"Why is the girl getting raped by a monster?!"

"A heroine getting raped by a monster; isn't this the basis of entertainment?"

"What sort of narrow genre is this?! And that girl is the main heroine?!"

"The epic story begins by having the main character saving the heroine. This is classic."

Sena, looking unconvinced, said.

"What you said is true… but wouldn't people gossip about the fact that the main heroine is not a virgin?"

"I don't understand your narrow view of the world."

…I didn't know what Sena and Yozora were talking about.

"What should we do about the setting of the main heroine?"

"I think we should go with the traditional heroine character with long black hair."

Sena immediately answered my question.

"Long black hair… you mean someone like me?"

Unexpectedly, Yozora replied contently.

Sena scolded at her and continued,

"Only the hair style is similar. Her personality will be kind, responsible, empathic, yet mentally strong. She is a bit myopic so she needs glasses. Cat ears. And finally she is the descendant of an angel."

"No such human exists."

"It's fine. The heroine is made up anyway."

"…Fu. It's too much work to keep track of all the little details. Okay then how about…"

As Yozora prepared to write down the setting for the main heroine,

"I believe the main heroine should be a delinquent as well. Someone who matches Aniki's status, a female version."

Yukimura expressed his puzzling opinion.

"Okay. I will add that in as well."

"[Heroine]"

"Long black hair. Glasses. Cat ears. A secret descendent of an angel. As the leader of a delinquent gang, she is very responsible and caring towards her underlings. She has everyone's admiration. "

"Why are we adding 'delinquent gang' to her setting!?"

"? I don't think this is out of place. In fact I am a bit envious."

"I wanted the caring class leader who takes care of her fellow classmates, not a delinquent gang."

So anyway, we decided on the heroine's setting.

"Next one up is the rising action. For this, after learning the heroine's secret, their relation quickly becomes intimate. Also we need to prepare a scene foreshadowing the events in the climax."

"True."

Sena nodded. Yozora made some more notes on her pad.

[Summary: Rising Action]

"Firstly, Meat Zaemon raped the main heroine. Then they quickly become intimate. Finally, he learnt of her secret.

"Why did the main character rape the heroine?!"

Sena and I yelled at the top of our lungs. Yozora, looking slightly red, answered,

"…Now that I think about it, I'm not familiar with the steps to becoming intimate with others. Also according to my writing guides, they suggested that 'if all else fails, just throw in some rape scenes and hope for the best.'"

"Where in the world would you find a heroine that if you rape her, she becomes closer to you… ahh… wait a second."

Sena seemed to recall a game that matched that description (probably an eroge). She became quiet.

"Good. Next up we have the climax. This stage is where something unexpected happens." "Unexpected huh… this is tough ."

I couldn't think of anything good.

"No matter how I consider it, I still think the plot 'the main character stole the girl's lover and she seeks revenge' is the best."

"Anything but that!"

Sena angrily stared at Yozora, who looked very serious when she said that.

"…The heroine called the main character to the park at midnight. Suddenly a bunch of guys showed up and raped him."

"You even have the main character raped?! How much do you like rape!"

Sena screeched.

"…But having the heroine backstab the main character is a really unexpected turn of events. How about this: although she lied to the main character, in truth she was forced to by a hidden antagonist."

"…Kodaka that's a pretty impressive idea."

Sena said with slight remorse.

"Aniki you are indeed great. You are indeed the underground evil overlord who controls this school from the shadows."

"…No, I am not an evil overlord."

"Then, we will settle on this."

"[Summary: Climax]"

"The main character's intimate heroine betrayed him so he raped her again. Now the hidden is revealed."

" I asked before but, why are you so fixated on having rape scenes everywhere?!"

"This is for entertainment plus fan service purposes."

"Rape is not fan service! Solving mysteries, defeating the secret overlord, and reaching the Good End are what we really need!"

"…Hm. Well I suppose we can redo this."

Yozora unhappily modified what she wrote;

"[Summary: Climax]"

"The heroine, who was close to the main character, betrayed him. As he interrogates her, he realizes the existence of a hidden antagonist."

"…Then we are finally at the end. The best finishing would be that they defeat the boss and live happily ever after."

"Yeah that's right."

I supported Sena's suggestion.

"The problem is what setting the boss should have. He must be someone very annoying and, when defeated, the audience should cheer in glee."

As Yozora talked out loud she scribbled down the setting for the boss.

"[The Final Boss]" "Blonde, an Ojou-sama from an upstart family. Always surrounded by guys. Her motto is 'I Got Lots of Money!'

"That's not me! No I never say things like 'I got lots of money!' I have to say the final boss should be someone who has 'long black hair, nasty looking eyes and a shitty personality.'"

"The heroine already has the long black hair attribute. Rejected."

…I guess the setting for the boss was set in stone.

"Good. Now that we have nailed the plot summary and the characters, all that's left is to write a script based on them. This should be quick and pleasant."

Yozora declared happily.

…By the way.

About the summary and the character settings, in Yozora's words, "After I got home I settled down and read through them again and I realized it won't work." With such a surprisingly honest reason, she rejected them. So we didn't actually write anything in the end.

I was just grateful that we didn't have to act out that nonsensical story.

Swimming Pool

After school, I went to the club room, Sena was playing a galgame.

On the computer screen girls with swimsuits said “Let’s enjoy ourselves today!” to the background of a beach.

Sena was grinning at the screen.

“Hey.”

I shook her anyway, which seemed to frighten her a bit, her arms shook quietly.

Dissatisfied, she asked,

“What…. It's only you? Where’s that vixen?”

“Yozora said her favorite book goes on sale today, so she went home.”

“Hm, seems I won't be disrupted from playing my game today.”

Sena said with joy as she continued her game.

I couldn’t help but look at the TV.

It was the scene where the protagonist was having fun in the pool with the girls.

They splashed water at each other, they played beach ball, and they had a swimming match.

“You swim so well Sena-kun~! I can't match you~.”

The girls all applauded for the protagonist who won the match.

All of a sudden, Sena stopped the game.

“…?”

I looked surprised at Sena who was still looking at the screen.

“…Hey, Kodaka, can you…”

“Yes?”

“…Can… can you… swim?”

Sena’s voice died down to a whisper.

“…? Well, yes, because my past school had swimming classes.”

“Really? So…”

“!”

Sena turned around suddenly, as her face approached mine.

I felt a bit of shock as I faced such a pretty face so closely.

Her face blushed.

"…Can you teach me to swim?"

She asked bashfully.

"…You can't swim?"

I was a bit surprised, as she was referred to as a sports genius before.

Sena replied unhappily:

"Sh-Shut up! I haven't had any swimming classes since elementary school."

"Hmm. I got it."

I thought about it carefully, but there was no swimming pool in this school.

"Well, of course I can teach you. Why did you suddenly want to learn?"

"You don't know? I want to be Natsumi's friend and we can go to the pool together. It's annoying if you can't swim when playing beside the sea. Moreover, Natsumi only cares about people who swim as well as her."

Certainly, Sena was saying something strange.

The so-called Natsumi was the girl who appeared in-game just now.

Being friends with Natsumi was definitely against the laws of physics. Well, I can't do anything though I can swim, so I didn't speak out.

"So, let's meet at 'Ryuuguu Land' this Sunday."

"Got it!"

Ryuuguu Land is a sports center which lies in the downtown area. Besides the pool there are other facilities in it.

I haven't been there yet because I had just moved back here so I've always wanted a chance to go.

"And Kodaka."

"Yes?"

"....Under no circumstances will you tell idiotic Yozora that I can't swim."

"Yes, yes."

I agreed because I knew she couldn't deal with Yozora.

Then at 10:30AM Sunday, 3 days later, Sena and I met and went to Ryuuguu Land.

In my mind the place should have been tending to stylish citizens, but I found it to be an elegant building with a dome roof.

Aside from the swimming pool there was a boxing room and a supermarket.

Showing our student ID, the discounted price seemed reasonable to us.

Maybe the only flaw of this place was the location, since it was a 40-minute walk to the nearest bus stop.

"Then, see you at the bathroom's entrance."

"Fine."

Sena and I went into separate changing rooms to get dressed.

Since there were only about 20 people in the changing room most of the lockers were unused.

I quickly put on my boardshorts and went to the pool. "So large ," I said as I glanced at the swimming pool.

The pool was not as crowded as I had imagined, so the customers swam around freely in the large pool.

Not far away was a small map. I read it carefully and figured out the pool was divided into a wave pool, flow pool, 25-meter pool, and a 50-meter pool. (Of course it didn't refer to the depth, but to the width or length). And other stuff such as water slides and a diving platform.

I guess the 25-meter pool would be most preferable for swimming practice.

...By the way, I wondered how I was going to teach someone to swim? I hadn't thought about it yet but it shouldn't matter too much.

I pondered a bit and looked around, absentminded.

"Kodaka."

Someone beside me called out my name, I looked and there was Sena dressed up in her swim suit.

She wore a luxurious bikini with figures on it. Well it was suitable for her.

She could show off her toned body while wearing her uniform but it was more apparent in this high-exposure swimsuit.

My eyesight lingered around her snow-white slim legs and her full bust, I think every man would give in to those.

Sena glanced around.

"Hmm…. It's quite a good place."

"Yes. It's such a large place so let's unleash your energy to swim ."

"Yes. It's lucky for us we came here before it goes bankrupt."

Sena said so.

"Bankrupt?"

"Because it doesn't get any business here."

"Is that so?"

"Absolutely, if people want to earn money with this large-scale structure, they have to attract not only the local population also people who live near the district, and due to the location of this pool, it's impossible to do that."

"So, why did they build the pool here?"

Ryuuguu Land is quite far from city center, staying in the lonely mountain area.

"In fact, this structure is not a single plan, there were plans for a large scale development. But due to various reasons, the tunnel, railroad, and the big residential area which should have been built were suspended, finally only Ryuuguu Land was totally constructed. And for the reasonable price, it used to attract many citizens from the city area, but the number of customers and the cost of this structure are out of proportion. And the citizens won't

come if they increase the price. So it will surely close down after a few years."

"That's a tough story, with such a dream-like name 'Ryuuguu'[9]. By the way, Sena, where did you get this information?"

"The mayor talked about it when he came to see my Papa."

"Papa…. the headmaster of our school."

"Yes."

"By the way I haven't seen the headmaster yet, maybe I should pay a visit to him."

"Hah?"

Sena suddenly voiced her panic.

"Why… why would you want to visit my Papa? Is it because you want to be my boyfriend. Did you consider today a date?"

I quickly explained as I looked at Sena who was blushing.

"No, no, no, you misunderstood me! My father and your father are old friends. He got me into this school with some extra assistance. That is why I have to thank him."

Sena showed a bit of surprise.

And her face blushed again.

“You should have told me earlier, idiot!”

“No, it was you who went mad first.”

Calming down, Sena said to me,

“Kodaka, how dare you show me such insolent behavior."

“Since when was I being insolent...”

“By the way, is it true that your Papa and mine are old friends?”

“They said so, so it must be true.”

“Hmm… It’s bad to say this as his daughter, but my Papa is an intangible person. People who can make friends with him are nearly non-existent. So what kind of person is your Papa?”

Sena was staring at me hard.

“Well, my father… perhaps lucid is a way to describe him. He can get along well with foreign people, he can make friends everywhere.”

“Your traits are totally different.”

“Shut up! By the way, your traits are similar to your father’s.”

“You're too innocent! My Mama lacks friends due to her arrogance. I am more similar to my Mama, including our appearance and characteristics.”

"...You know you're arrogant huh..."

"What's wrong with perfect people showing off themselves? And it's truly noble, complete and perfect."

"Yeah yeah..."

I was tired of this topic, so I gave in.

"So, teach this perfect me to swim now."

"Yeah yeah..."

After warming-up and a hot shower, Sena and I went to the 25-meter pool.

"So, what are we going to do?"

Asked Sena as she got in the pool.

I was not a PE teacher, let alone a coach, so I had no idea how to teach her. Anyway I thought back to what I learned in swimming class.

"First… try submerging your head underwater."

"…I'm not a fool."

"No, in elementary school, those who can't swim practice this so…"

"Everyone can dive, right?"

Then Sena immediately dived into the water.

Following her, I dived in as well.

Under water we looked eye to eye; our eyes were open just a little bit. We went back to the surface.

"Hmm… next comes the splashing practice."

"Got it."

Sena lay down on the edge of the pool, floating her body on the surface, and began splashing.

…Well, her proficient movement showed no traits of a beginner.

Holding her wrists straight to keep her body balanced, trying to straighten her legs, and using all of her power on the toes to splash water.

It lasted nearly a minute, she didn't strike heavily on the water on purpose to make bubbles, after that she just splashed randomly as she wanted.

"Your flutter kicking is so skillful..."

"Is there good or bad way to do something like this?"

It was so annoying to hear her ask that.

"…Ah, so next don't lay on the edge, we'll practice with you holding onto my hands instead."

"Alright."

Sena held onto my hands.

"Good. Now use your leg to kick water just like before."

"OK."

Sena began swinging her legs.

I held Sena's hands and moved backwards slowly.

Sena didn't get confused despite this and still kicked skillfully.

"Now, try to submerge your head underwater."

"OK."

This time, too, she listened to my instructions and submerged her head under water.

By this time her body showed a better kicking form.

Under for nearly 10 seconds, her head rose, took a breath, and submerged again.

This was done 5 times in a row and Sena's form was still perfect.

…At this point was it okay to let my hands go now...?

I was still worried, but I finally decided to loosen my hands and move aside.

Sena was still splashing water while moving forward.

Her speed was beyond my imagination so I had to hurry to catch up with her.

She swam for nearly 10 meters.

“Fwah!!”

Sena’s head rose from the water as she stopped her legs.

She waved to me, laughing.

“Aha, that’s it? It seems swimming is easier than I thought.”

Her smile, different from her usual arrogant smile, was full of childish delight.

"Hmm? What's up?"

"Ah. No… nothing."

Lost in what I saw, I quickly blurted out.

"All right. Next, teach me about crawl, Kodaka"

"A-Ah, yes. Let's try crawl next."

In just 10 minutes, Sena went from a beginner to a master of flutter kicking. Surprised, I continued to teach her.

After that, Sena was being able to crawl so easily.

She still had some trouble breathing. But after practicing for half an hour, her crawl form as good as mine.

Her speed was faster than before when she was just flutter kicking, and Sena swam around the pool happily.

Seeing her like that made me unconsciously smile.

Next, I taught her breaststroke.

It took more time to teach her breaststroke compared to the crawl, the reason being I wasn't good at breaststroke myself, let alone teaching her.

But in a short amount of time she had learned it.

Perhaps her breaststroke form was even better than mine.

And, without me teaching, she learned backstroke.

“Alright Kodaka, teach me butterfly stroke next!”

Sena said with a smile.

“No, I haven’t learned butterfly stroke, so I can’t teach you that.”

I thought teaching butterfly stroke in a high school swimming lesson was not a good idea anyway.

“Is that so? Then it can't be helped...”

Sena said with a little disappointment.

“Well, let’s forget that; I’m little tired so let’s go up and have a break. But before that, let’s see who can swim to the other side the quickest.”

“…! Okay…!”

I wouldn't lose to someone who had just learned to swim less than 2 hours ago.

With that thought, I used crawl, and somehow won.

Although I won, it was a narrow victory which fiercely broke my confidence.

Getting out of the pool, we bought drinks and fried noodles from the store as our lunch.

A long time ago I went to beach with my family, and we ate fried noodles. I don't know why it tastes so wonderful.

Was there a way to acquire the secret of this taste...?

"I learnt to swim faster than expected. Now that I have achieved my objective it's a good chance to go to other pools, and I also want to play on the water slides. "

Sena said after she chomped down a big dish of noodles and 3 Frankfurt sausages.

"I see."

While eating noodles, I agreed with her suggestion.

…Practicing would make her be better than me, which meant her suggestion was beneficial to my position.

“Huhuhu. Now when Natsumi appears I can deal with the situation easily.”

It was impossible for Natsumi to appear anyway...

“…Hmm… meat.”

“What?”

Sena reacted quickly to my moaning.

“…Eh, no, I meant the meat in the fried noodles is tough to eat, I can’t even bite it.”

“…”

Sena turned away, blushing.

“Don't say something so confusing, idiot”

“…You totally accept people calling you Meat, although only Yozora calls you that.”

“…True, It’s that idiot's fault for giving me such a weird name …”

Sena face showed glumness.

"I have the feeling you accepted it from the beginning though."

The first time Sena was called Meat was when we were playing MonKari, and Sena didn't seem to mind her nicknames like Meat and Cow.

When I pointed that out, Sena blushed and said,

"…because this is my first nickname."

"Eh?"

"…I-I said that was the first time someone gave me a nickname … so I was a little glad."

Sena's face blushed even more.

"G-Glad?"

"Y-Yes. So don't tell Yozora!! By the way, we'd better continue swimming since we've finished our lunch."

Sena said while looking at me.

"A-Ah… got it. …But first I have to go to the toilet."

"Hurry up!"

"Right."

I answered and left.

…To my surprise, she was glad with her nickname Meat.

For Yozora, the nickname contained no intimacy at all, it was 100% insult. But I wouldn't tell Sena that.

There were too few toilets in such a big place, so I took a long time to find one.

When I was done I washed my hands and took a shower, then went back to where Sena was.

When I looked towards her—

"…Hmm?"

I squinted and looked closely.

Three men had struck up a conversation with her.

They all had dyed hair, showing that they were delinquents.

I could only assume they were flirting with her.

So Sena being popular was true…

Well, they would leave her alone if they knew she came with a male.

So I didn't worry too much and approached Sena.

But as I went closer, I felt something was wrong.

The more Sena said, the more angry the men got.

…Uwah I had a bad feeling about this…

Could it be, although Sena was attractive, that she didn't know how to deal with a situation of flirting?

"…You… don't act so cocky!!"

Their angry words came to my ears from the distance.

Next was,

"Hah? Who is cocky, you walking piece of trash. All of you are just nameless mob characters with no right to talk to me in the first place. What an eyesore, just disappear already. And don't come within ten kilometers of me ever again, you third class bacteria."

Uwahh…

Hearing her reply, I unintentionally pressed my fingers to my temple.

Although she always lost arguments with Yozora her sharp tongue was still significant.

Now I know why people who always fight with stronger enemies can get more EXP and increase their level faster.

And of course, the anger voltage of those men rose rapidly too.

“This bitch…!” “Damn it!!”

“Hm, for quite a while now your comebacks have all been the same. Woman, bitch, damn… how poor is your vocabulary? Ah… maybe you guys don’t even know what a vocabulary is, do you think it’s a foreign language? Don’t just stand there, get back to elementary school to study further, you apes.”

“Damn you!!”

“…Oi wait, aren't her legs trembling?”

One of the men said this and Sena’s face froze.

“Uwa, it’s true.” “So, what’s up with your legs shaking?”

“H-Hah? D-Don’t get the wrong idea, it’s impossible for me to be afraid of tapeworms like you guys! Not only is your brain and face screwed, so are your eyes, aren't they? Ah, I was mistaken, you’re wild animals not humans anyway! I won't give you any food even if you beg though!”

“Look! She cried.” “Hey, hey! You made her cry.” “But suddenly I find this girl really cute.”

"…W-Who's crying? You're lower than maggot trash. Are your brains being eaten by tapeworms, and your eyeballs dropping down from your cranium? I will kill you if you keep saying something like that!"

Eyes filled with tears, Sena shouted, whereas the men just laughed at her more. Sena clenched her fists, trembling.

…How troublesome…

I approached Sena.

"Sena."

I said behind those men.

"Ah…"

Suddenly Sena became relieved.

"Who the hell are y-…!"

When the men turned back and stared at me face to face, they showed a bit of fear.

Hmm… it looked like they were just a bit older than me.

"I'm with her."

I stared at them, lowered my voice, and said it with a little anger.

"What the!! She has a boyfriend." "You should've said so first!" "What a waste of time! Let's go."

The men said with faded voices.

They held a frightening pose, took their eyes off me, and left.

…I was relieved that they pulled back without any difficulty.

Right when I started to relax,

"Wait right there, you maggot trash! How dare you insult a heavenly being like me! Kneel down and beg for forgiveness, then you can go die somewhere far away!"

It was hard work driving them away, but Sena kept adding fuel to the fire.

Give me a break…

"I'll kill you bitch!!!!!"

One of them tried to catch Sena.

I quickly caught his wrist and stopped him.

"Let me go!"

"It's not good to use violence to deal with this situation."

"Are you kidding? How can you stand this situation?"

…Well, I understood how he was feeling.

"You better step back!"

Another man said and came to hit me, so I quickly pushed the first man into him.

"Whoa!?" "Uwah!?"

The two men yelled and crashed into each other.

Next, the 3rd guy gave me a punch… but I caught his wrist and wrenched it behind his back.

"Ouch!!"

I pushed his body into the wire fence beside me, glared directly at the eyes of the man in front, and warned him with as threatening a tone as possible.

"Could you let this matter drop? …Or else…"

I wrenched his wrist up strongly and smiled.

…Although it's not usually my intention, my face when smiling is my most scariest feature.

"G…! I got it… let's go!"

"I'm glad you understand."

I let him go and pushed him towards his two companions.

The three of them stared at me angrily and ran away.

“Haa…”

It was really over, I let out a sigh of relief.

Then, Sena’s voice came to me,

“Good job, Kodaka. I used to think that you were a weak delinquent, but you’re actually good at fighting too. I praised you so you better appreciate it. Huhu, I'll let you lick my feet as a reward.”

It seemed Sena was happy.

“…Well, since I always fought with delinquents or upper classmen since primary school I’m actually familiar with fighting.”

Actually it was more appropriate to say “got used to”, people wouldn’t help a transfer student they didn't know, which meant that I had to use my own power to protect myself.

They would haunt me forever if I showed them any weakness, so I couldn’t back off.

Basically my trick was to pretend to be strong to intimidate them, I'm no good if a fight really breaks out.

“Well, I hope they know their limits. Dumbasses always make trouble.”

"Ah… actually you are the dumbass, you idiot."

I was not pretending like I did with those flirting guys just now, I shouted and stared at Sena with real anger.

"W-What…?"

Sena was a little frightened, I kept on saying,

"Why did you purposely provoke them? They will give up talking to you if you say you are with a guy. You could even call security here if they kept on bothering you. Anyone would get angry if they're fiercely insulted for trying to chat with you."

"B-Because… those people are too nauseating…"

"There are people who want to flirt with girls everywhere. This is common sense."

"K-Kodaka, what's with you? I thank you, and now you're trying to scold me!?"

Sena said, her eyes filled with tears.

"Yeah, I am scolding you! Those are reasonable guys, whereas in this world there are worse people all over the place! This is not our clubroom. Fighting with people for no reason could have irreversible consequences. And I can't always be there to protect you."

"Shut up! Leave me alone! This is none of your business!"

"It is my business!"

We stared at each other with anger.

How could I ignore my friends when they were in danger? Sena was a total idiot.

"You say… this is your business…?"

Suddenly Sena's face blushed.

"…Sena?"

"A-Ah, fine, it's my fault! I'll be careful from now on, ok?"

Sena said sincerely.

"I appreciate you helping me. And also y-your concern. This is the first time a boy my own age... really got mad at me..."

"Hah?"

I could not hear the latter part of the sentence because she said it in a quiet voice, with her head lowered.

"Shut up! Forget it! We're going home now! I don't want to see those guys again!"

"Eh? Oi!?"

Sena left me behind and rushed to the exit, and I hurried to follow her.

On the bus heading home Sena kept silent.

She occasionally looked in my direction, but she would turn her head away if our eyes met. It seemed like she was very angry at me.

But as soon as we got off the bus in front of the station it was time to split up.

“Th-Thanks for today, for… various things.”

Sena said suddenly.

Her face blushed furiously.

“…Let's go again sometime. We haven’t enjoyed the wave pool and the sliding pool.”

“Eh, ah, ok…”

“Well then, bye bye.”

After saying goodbye quickly, Sena hurried to the parking lot beside the bus station.

……

…I didn't really understand… was she not mad anymore?

I thought about it while walking to the bus station…

Past

It had been a while since the last time I swam, so I couldn't shake off the fatigue after I went to swim with Sena.

Was it because of a lack of exercise... ever since the time when I transferred in it seemed that I never exercised much in P.E. Class (because nobody would pass the ball to me during football lessons).

Today was Monday and I felt like sleeping the entire day away. But if I fell asleep in class I'd be treated like a delinquent again, so I continued to keep myself awake and listen to the lesson.

But it seemed that the teachers were scared of me during the few times our eyes met...

Anyway, I managed to hang on until the end of class. I came to the clubroom, sat on the sofa, and the strong sleepy feeling struck me again.

Perhaps it was because I was sleeping at a place I wasn't used to that I did not really fall asleep, but dreamt.

Perhaps it was because of the scuffle yesterday at the swimming pool that I dreamt of something a long time ago.

Maybe it was because the first impression I gave was bad or because I was forced to keep transferring schools; even though I got a few people whom I could eat and have fun with, it didn't seem that I could make a good friend I could really trust.

Even so, I did make a friend that I thought could be considered my good friend.

Right now, I couldn't remember what that kid looked like, or even his name, but I remember that it was about 10 years ago when I first met him, when I was still living here.

On a certain evening, I was being bullied at the park beside the primary school I was studying at.

Five students of the same year as me surrounded me, beat me up and even threw stones at me. The primary schoolboys were very direct in their attacks, not thinking through and not holding back at all. They were just doing it to satisfy and enjoy themselves.

At the start, I tried my best to fight them off.

Students of the same age don’t have that much difference in strength. Thus, if we're all equal in strength, the side with more people will win. In this 1v5 situation, I couldn't possibly win, and got pummeled by them.

I was already somewhat isolated from the students in my class because of my blond hair and savage looking eyes. One day, a

teacher who didn't know that I had mixed-blood scolded me in front of everyone in class, saying 'dyeing your hair at this age, are you a delinquent', and that sparked off everything.

Delinquents are bad. They could bully a bad person to their hearts content.

The children who derived this logic out of their childish reasoning didn't feel stricken with conscience at all. They called out some kamen rider or fighter anime moves as they beat me up without mercy.

I wanted to play dead to prevent them from bullying me. However, my stubborn belief of not wanting to lose to these guys made me glare back at them and get up, no matter how many times I was beaten down.

I would probably die if this continued on—I saw the news on TV where people 'couldn't take the bullying and committed suicide', 'mass bullying caused the student to die' and things like that. As a child, I was seriously thinking about dying.

But at that moment, a boy suddenly barged in.

The children who were bullying me yelled at him, telling him not to interfere.

But that boy stood right in front of them and shouted at them,

“Don't bully the weak!”

Those children were drunk on their fantasy of being envoys of justice, and that sentence basically dampened their spirits. Thus, the five children who exerted violence on me treated the boy as an 'enemy'.

They rushed towards him, and just when their fists were about to hit that boy—

I punched that boy in the face with all my strength.

"!"

Because of my unexpected action, the boy and the other five children looked stunned.

"Wha-What are you doing!? I was helping you..."

With teary eyes, I glared at the boy who stepped in to help me, and shouted,

"I-I'M NOT WEAK!"

To me, compared to the violence those bullies exhibited against me, the casual words of the boy was the attack that hurt me the most.

The boy was immediately stunned, and then laughed crudely,

"Ahaha! Very good! You bastard!"

As he shouted, he punched me in the face mercilessly.

The punches of those bullies were nothing compared to his. That punch was hard, and hurt a lot.

I countered back, and the boy continued to beat me up.

The boy and I just left those bullies aside as we started fighting.

“DO-DON'T LEAVE US ASIDE!”

One of the children who recovered immediately ran at us.

“DON'T GET IN OUR WAY!”

The boy and I reacted in perfect chemistry and kicked him. Bully A cried out as he fell.

The other children shouted as they rushed at us.

Both of us stopped our battle and started fighting against those five bullies.

2 vs 5. My side still felt rather isolated.

However, just the fact that the boy was fighting alongside me caused an unbelievable strength to rise up in me.

For some reason, even though I struggled to stand up, my tired and battered body felt extremely light.

And once the battle was over, we won.

The five bullies cried as they ran away.

But to me, I didn't care what happened to them.

The boy seemed to feel that way as well.

After those five ran away, we started fighting again.

And this battle ended up being a stalemate.

We were tired as we sprawled out on the ground.

We were covered in dirt, scratches and bruises. We looked completely pathetic.

Though my body hurt, for some reason, I smiled at the boy.

“You're rather strong.”

The boy's frivolous face gave an innocent smile as he said to me, “You're not too bad yourself.”

We really did something that would only happen in those hot-blooded shounen manga. Ever since that day, we would meet up with each other in the park and play together.

As we were studying in different primary schools back then we could only meet after school. But to me, that boy was undeniably my closest ally in this world.

I don't know when it was when he said this to me,

“Taka, my mom mentioned that it doesn't matter even if you can't get 100 friends once you graduate to your next class, you must find a real friend that you can treasure with the feelings of 100 people. Once you get this true friend that you can view as more important than anyone else, your future will be bright.”

Having a true friend I can treasure with 100 people's worth of feelings as compared to having 100 friends... that's a great line, I feel.

So I said, “Then, I'll use the feelings of a hundred people to treasure OO. Even if there's 100 people... no. No matter if it’s a million or trillion people, even if the entire world views you as an enemy, I'll still be your friend.”

As I said that, he started blushing.

“D-Don't say such embarrassing things!”

“Wha-what? Didn't you say that first?”

I felt embarrassed about it too as my face went red.

And then, we started laughing.

We were undoubtedly true friends.

That's what I thought then...

As I opened my eyes, I saw the stinging sunset shining in through the window.

Yozora was sitting on the sofa opposite, reading the light novel with that unhappy look like usual.

There was no other person in the clubroom other than Yozora and me.

It doesn't matter even if you can't get 100 friends once you graduate to next year, but you must find a real friend that you can treasure with the feelings of 100 people... is that so?

My mind was still fuzzy and I unknowingly muttered what that buddy of mine said in the dream.

At that moment—

Pak! The book Yozora was holding onto suddenly dropped from her hands.

"Ko-Kodaka, so you remembered..."

Yozora stared at me with a surprised look, and her trembling voice seemed to be mumbling something.

This was the first time I had ever seen Yozora so agitated since the day when I first spoke to her, the day when I witnessed her talking to her air friend.

“...What's wrong?”

I look surprised and asked, and Yozora frantically picked up the book that dropped onto the floor.

“No-Nothing... I was startled that you suddenly spoke.”

Yozora stammered and finished before immersing herself in the world of her book again.

For some reason, I saw that her face was really red. The reason couldn't be just because of the sunset glow, right?

“Sorry for startling you... where's Sena and Yukimura?”

“They went back already. There wasn't anything special to do today.”

Yozora answered with a somewhat unhappy expression.

“Hmm...”

I looked at the clock, and found that it was already past 6.

It seemed that I had slept for a long time.

“I'm going back too.”

"Oh."

I took my bag and stood up, and felt that my neck hurt somewhat.

Walking out of the clubroom, I vividly recalled the dream I just had.

The buddy I separated from 10 years ago...

How was he getting on?

Was he still living in that street?

What did he look like now?

What was his name?

He called me 'Taka' as a nickname, and I seemed to keep calling him by his nickname, not his real name.

--Then, I'll use the feelings of a hundred people to treasure OO. Even if there's 100 people...no. No matter if it's a million or trillion people, even if the entire world views you as an enemy, I'll still be your friend.

--Then, I'll use the feelings of a hundred people to treasure OO.

What did I call him back then?

"...Ah, forget about it."

That was a long time ago anyway.

He definitely wouldn't remember what happened 10 years ago, right?

The me back then would never believe that I would be thinking about him now.

Regardless of important memories or the sadness of separation, there will be a time when everything changes. Can I really get a friend I'll appreciate for the rest of my life?

A tinge of loneliness struck me. I walked out of the church and went home.

Afterword

Nice to meet you, or ‘long time no see’, this is Hirasaka Yomi.

About "Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai" or "Haganai" for short (just came up with it), how was it?

This novel is a story about myself who also had few friends, bad communication skills, negative thinking, lacking life experiences and useless delusional habits. It is my work that I feel completely satisfied with. Personally, this novel is the easiest style to write, easiest to read, contains the most favorite character types, the most interesting and the most comfortable story to write for me.

Usually I would have to think about the boring "For this work, what is the theme and message that would be included?", and I had to write about the settings or the characters that I really didn't want to do; also when there was something I wanted to write about, it conflicted with the setting so I couldn't put it in the novel. But this time I had permission to write a fun story in any way I want without any guidelines or restrictions.

So this work came from what I like personally and if possible I also want readers to enjoy it like I did, let us compete to see who can get more enjoyment out of it.

For this novel to continue releasing, it depends on the number of sales. Whether it has to end in 3 volumes or continues for longer , it all depends on how well it sells. Since this work is very

different from my previous work, "Light Novel Club" because it has a relatively high level of freedom, I want to keep writing it for as long as possible.

Incidentally, "Light Novel Club" and this work both are short stories about everyday life, but for me "Haganai" is very different in a way, especially main characters. Because, in the previous work , they are all good and already have good relationships to begin with, completely opposite of the Neighbors Club members. So readers who enjoyed that work, or did not enjoy it, please try to compare it with this work, wouldn't that be interesting?

Last is for thank you.

First, K-san from MF Bunko J, who was responsible for this novel to be able to be published, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. And just as importantly, Buriki-san, this novel illustrator . Whom I hoped to help me by doing illustrations, agreed to lend the talent to draw the attractive illustrations in this work, I really thank you. And lastly, to you who bought this book. Thank you very much.

I don't know if you have many friends or not. But even if you have a few friends you still can get unexpectedly a lot of enjoyment out of your life, and maybe it can even earn money like this (vivid story). I wanted to tell this to my pessimistic high school self 10 years ago.

End of July 2009, Hirasaka Yomi

References

1. ↑ ["お" I missed this the first time, but apparently this is a neta based on a very infamous story in Jap RO server. http://www.new-akiba.com/news/0603/17/02/index.html]
2. ↑ [I think it's a special cram school that 'combines paper-based materials with online study activities via the internet' http://educationinjapan.wordpress.com/2008/11/30/shinkenzemi-jhs-coursei-new-home-based-learning-online-co/]
3. ↑ [cute chick or beautiful girl]
4. ↑ ['North Sawara']
5. ↑ a traditional Japanese rug, also used as a measurement for room size
6. ↑ [TL note: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anpanman]
7. ↑ [TL note: セ, explaining what it means would need a broad review of the evolution of post-EVA era anime industry. Anyone interested can read the links http://d.hatena.ne.jp/keyword/%a5%bb%a5%ab%a5%a4%b7%cf http://www.project-japan.jp/tinyd3+index.id+3.htm http://www.crunchyroll.com/forumtopic-374505/social-issue/]
8. ↑ [These are word plays on the Super Famicom (aka Super Nintendo/Super Nintendo Entertainment System/SNES) and the Sega Mega Drive, both gaming consoles from the mid-1990's]
9. ↑ Palace of the Dragon King